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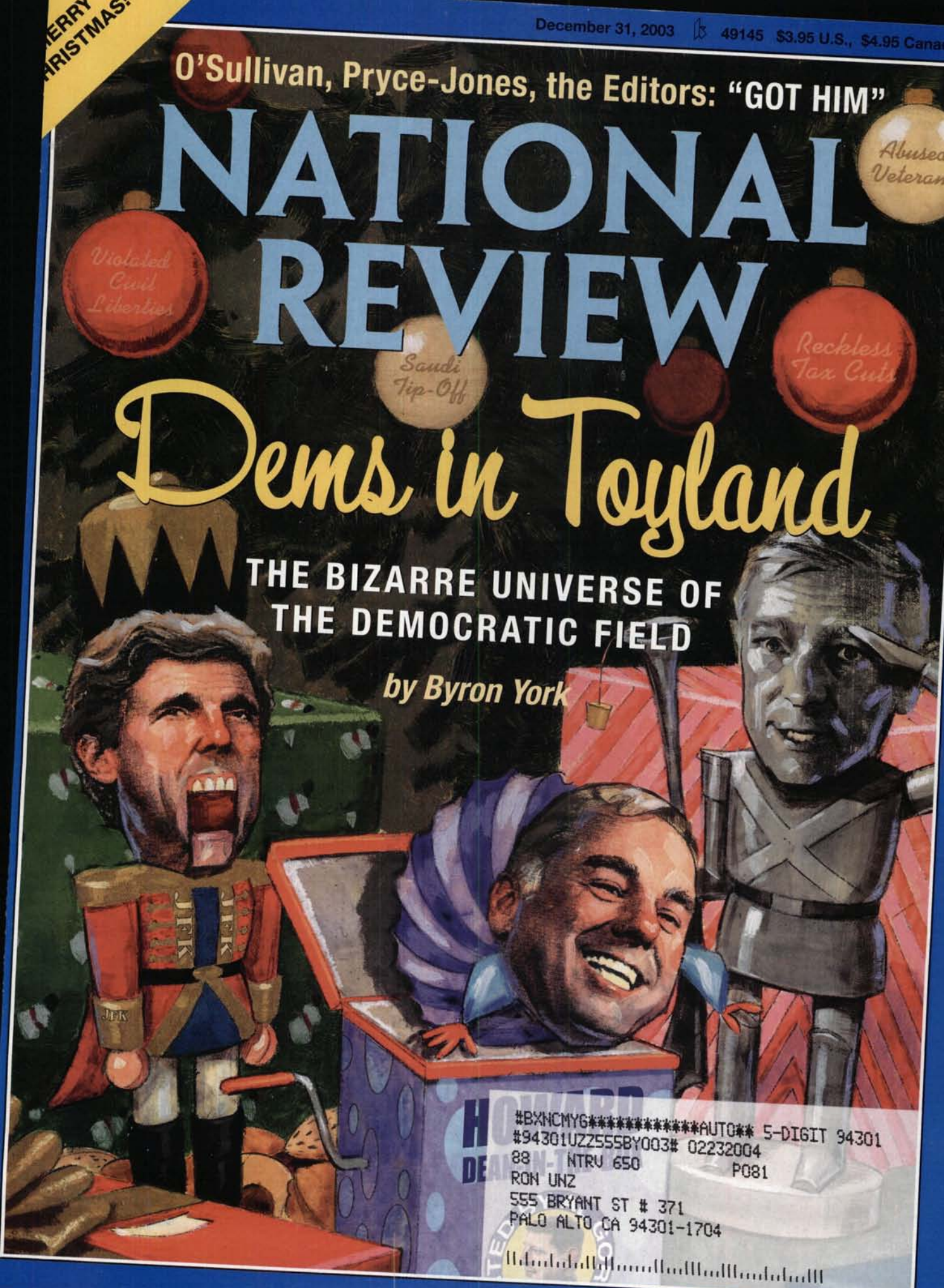
THE BIZARRE UNIVERSE OF THE DEMOCRATIC FIELD

by Byron York



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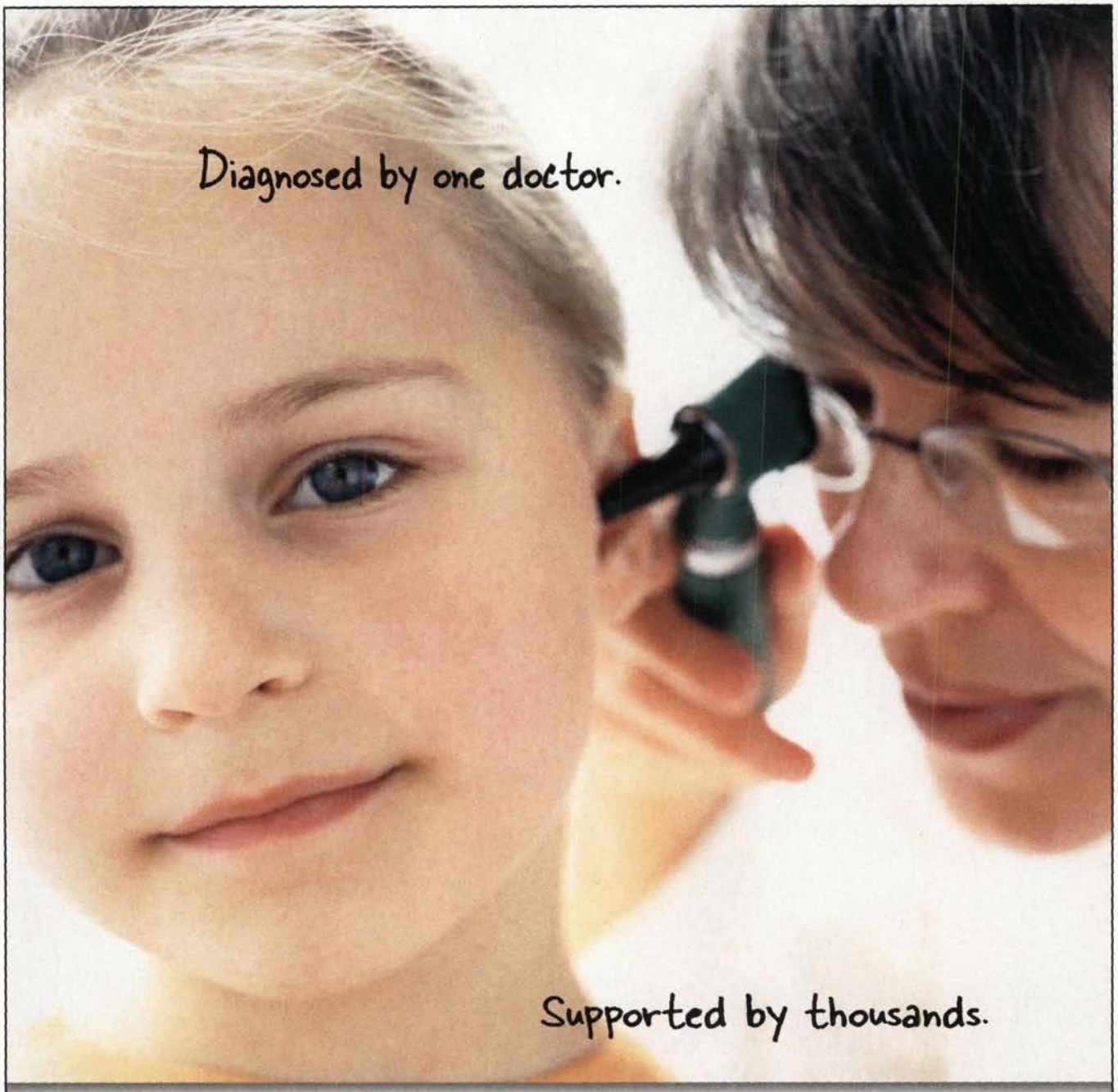

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■ COVER STORY

George W. Bush in the Democratic Mind

Imagine, if you can, a world in which your only sources of information were the speeches, debates, and press releases of the Democratic candidates for president. In such a world, you would surely believe that George W. Bush is a very, very bad man. *By Byron York*

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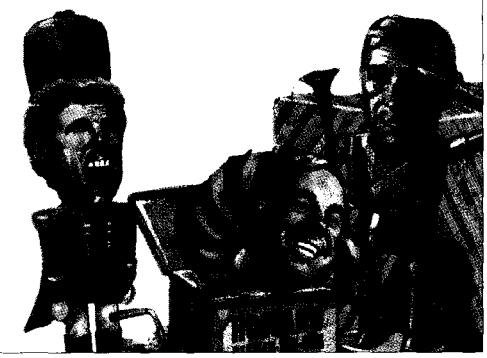

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COVER: *Darren Gygi*

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Ramesh Ponnuru / David Pryce-Jones
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Detroit Rep. Joseph J. Colucci 248-626-9918

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letters to the editor

NEVER FORGETTING

William J. Bennett ("Never Again, Again," Dec. 8) has written a profound article about the Holocaust and 9/11. May we never forget the images of the Twin Towers burning, or the horrors of the gas ovens. They point to the reality of what happens when good people do nothing in the face of evil. Thank God, then, that our president is vigilant and proactive in America's response to this terror. One responsibility as the world's superpower is our moral duty to prevent acts of genocide and the grossest oppression of mankind. Along with our greatness comes a tremendous burden: Sometimes, we will be lonely first-responders in a world full of indecision between right and wrong.

Nancy J. Irvin
Cooperstown, N.Y.

PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ROME

David Klinghoffer ("Religious Fiction," Dec. 8) wonders why Catholics bother to refute the nonsense in *The Da Vinci Code*.

The answer is simple: The media (ABC, *Newsweek*) have used this book to promote the idea that while *The Da Vinci Code*'s claims may be silly, it's still true that the Catholic Church has always oppressed women and seekers of Truth. And politicians—as Bill Pryor can tell you—then use this prejudiced notion to reduce Catholics to second-class citizens.

If someone wrote a book claiming that, say, Joe Lieberman and George Soros were two of the Elders of Zion, ABC and *Newsweek* would never argue that while the *Protocols* may be silly, Jews do actually run the country. That's the difference.

Don Schenk
Allentown, Pa.

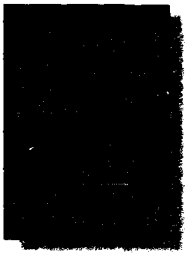
RED-STATE RESTRAINT

In the context of the gay-marriage debate, your Mark Steyn said, "There are no reliably 'red states' in the judiciary" ("Happy Warrior," Dec. 22). This is not true.

Steyn's analysis is colored by northeastern blinders. There are many states where judges are responsible and restrained—but they are usually the states where judges are elected. Election of judges, particularly in partisan contests complete with primary challenges, allows voters to hold activist judges accountable. As a result, judges are checked—if not by good sense and judicial decorum, at least by fear of voters.

Of course, in a perfect world, judges would not need to be held back from imperial judicial overreach by fear of losing office. But, as James Madison noted, if men were angels, governments would not be needed. Had Madison envisioned the rampant activism of the modern courts, he would surely have crafted in the federal Constitution a further check on the power of judges.

Many of the western and southern states created their judicial structures after the rise of judicial activism and, hence, remedied Madison's failure in their own judiciaries. I note especially the Texas supreme court, which has had its share of judicial-restraint advocates.



These judges were elected precisely because they are reliably "red state" in their views on the role of the judiciary. Perhaps if other states followed Texas's example, we would have a nation governed by laws, not by judges bent on social reengineering.

Of course, the American Bar Association wants to do away with partisan election of judges—so that all states will be more like Massachusetts.

God help us. And God bless Texas.

David Rogers
Austin, Tex.

FAIR AND BALANCED

Thank you for Jay Nordlinger's balanced analysis of the battle between People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Kentucky Fried Chicken ("PETA vs. KFC," Dec. 22). I was pleased—and surprised—particularly by the statement, "[J]ust because [PETA] says something, doesn't mean it's not true."

Emma Vardaman
St. Louis, Mo.

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The Buffett Trade Deficit Proposal

Fortune Magazine (October 26, 2003) carries an article by Warren Buffett, the well- known investor and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, that describes the dangers being created by mounting U.S. trade deficits. He also offers a proposal on how America can balance its trade with the rest of the world.

In this article, Buffett reveals that since the spring of 2002 Berkshire Hathaway, for the first time, has been buying foreign currencies in "significant" quantities. Buffett believes that the value of the dollar will decline. The mounting U.S. trade deficit, he explains, is the reason behind these currencies buys. America is trading away its assets for consumables, which ultimately is unsustainable.

The Buffett proposal would result in increased U.S. exports and probably overall increases in world trade. Most important, it would balance U.S. imports and exports without a large decline in the dollar's value.

Buffett proposes that each exporter from the United States be issued Import Certificates (ICs) in an amount equal to the value of their exports. The exporter would then sell the ICs to U.S. importers or foreign exporters who wished to bring foreign-made goods into the U.S. market. As Buffett explains, "To import $1 million of goods, an importer would need ICs that were the byproduct of $1 million of exports."

Since the United States exports almost $1 trillion annually, huge quantities of ICs would be available. Market competition would determine the price for these ICs. Buffett also envisions each IC would have a life of only six months to discourage speculators from accumulating them.

To illustrate his proposal, Buffett postulates that the ICs would sell for 10 cents on the dollar. Thus, a U.S. producer would have an extra incentive to export their goods. If the value of the export is $10,000, for example, and the IC sells at 10 cents on the dollar, then the total return to the U.S. exporter is $11,000.

The Buffett proposal does not discriminate between imported goods as differential rate tariffs do. The ICs, moreover, would be available to all foreign producers on an equal basis – by nationality and product. As the trade deficit narrows, the value and cost of the IC would lessen.

The proposal would raise prices U.S. consumers paid for foreign goods, though not for domestically produced goods, and would reduce profits of foreign producers. Ultimately, however, those burdens would be less and more equitable distributed than with any of the other solutions to the U.S. trade deficit now being proposed.

The Buffett proposal appears to be one of the least painful and most equitable ways for the U.S to balance its trade accounts. The idea merits serious and immediate attention by U.S. policy makers.

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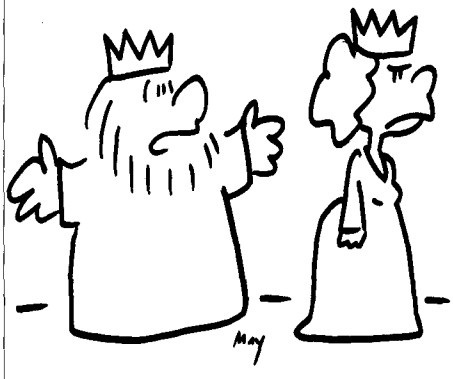

"But, dear—morality is so bourgeois!*"*

■ In CBS/*New York Times* poll, President **Bush** earns 58 percent approval rating. . . . **Paul Bremer** announces capture of **Saddam Hussein**: "Ladies and gentlemen, we got him." . . . Bush: "This afternoon, I have a message for the Iraqi people: You will not have to fear the rule of Saddam Hussein ever again." . . . Hussein upon his capture, according to Army Maj. **Bryan Reed**: "I am the president of Iraq and I want to negotiate." . . . U.S. Special Forces, in reply: "President Bush sends his regards." . . . Bush on disallowing countries that opposed Iraq war to bid on reconstruction contracts: "It's very simple. Our people risk their lives. Friendly coalition folks risk their lives, and, therefore, the contracting is going to reflect that. And that's what the U.S. taxpayers expect." . . . Bush on remark by German chancellor **Gerhard Schroeder** that "international law must apply" to contracting: "International law? I better call my lawyer. He didn't bring that up to me."

■ **Al Gore** endorses **Howard Dean** for president: "He was the only major candidate who made the correct judgment about the Iraq war." . . . Sen. **Chris Dodd** (D., Conn.) on Gore's refusal to support Sen. **Joe Lieberman** (D., Conn.): "There's a strong hint of disloyalty in it." . . . Sen. **John Kerry** (D., Mass.) on Bush: "the most arrogant, inept, reckless, and ideological foreign policy in modern history." . . . **Wesley Clark** calls Bush "reckless, radical, and heartless" and says Iraq war "casts doubt on [Bush's] competence as a commander in chief.". . . **Will Marshall** of Progressive Policy Institute on Iraq, in *Los Angeles Times*: "You hear way too much from the Democrats in this race about turning over the whole mess to the U.N." . . . Dean on whether he would retain **Colin Powell** as secretary of state, in *Washington Post*: "That may or may not be in the cards." . . . Dean in 1998: "The French will always do exactly the opposite of what the United States wants regardless of what happens, so we're never going to have a consistent policy."

■ Pew polls Democrats in early primary states. . . . In Iowa, Dean leads (29 percent), followed by Gephardt (21 percent) and Kerry (18 percent). . . . In New Hampshire, Dean (34 percent) tops Kerry (20 percent). . . . In South Carolina, Edwards (16 percent) runs ahead of Clark (11 percent) and Gephardt (10 percent). . . . Sen. **Hillary Clinton** (D., N.Y.), in *Austin American-Statesman,* says Bush "is making America less fair, free, strong, smart than it deserves to be in a dangerous world."

■ Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger** (R., Calif.) on whether he'll campaign for Bush, on Fox News: "Yes. Absolutely. I mean, I will be there for him. I told him that. And I will do anything possible." . . . Former House Speaker **Newt Gingrich** on Republicans who might run for president in 2008, on *Meet the Press*: "There could be a lot of people. I mean, you'd have to say that Sen. **Bill Frist** is extraordinarily attractive. You'd have to say that Gov. **Jeb Bush** is very, very attractive." . . . Following manslaughter conviction of Rep. **Bill Janklow** (R.), South Dakota schedules special election for June, with both parties believing they can win. . . . Sen. **John Breaux** (D., La.) announces retirement, creating pick-up opportunity for GOP. . . . In Allentown *Morning Call* poll, Sen. **Arlen Specter** (R., Pa.) leads primary challenger, Rep. **Pat Toomey**, 52 percent to 35 percent. Only 47 percent of voters recognize Toomey's name, compared to 98 percent for Specter.

■ NRA's **Wayne LaPierre** on Supreme Court's campaign-finance decision, in *Washington Post*: "the most significant change in the First Amendment since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which tried to make it a crime to criticize a member of Congress." . . . ACLU's **Anthony D. Romero**: "The notion that the government can tell an organization like the ACLU when and how it should address important civil-liberties issues is a form of censorship masquerading as campaign-finance reform." . . . After Florida jury convicts six Cubans for hijacking plane to U.S., federal prosecutor **Harry Wallace** comments: "Today's verdict sends a clear message that our goal here is sympathetic to people wanting to come to the United States, but that we will not tolerate the use of violence or the threat of violence in order to do it." . . . Countering congressional GOP move to put **Ronald Reagan** on dime, House Democrats sponsor legislation to keep FDR on it. . . . **Nancy Reagan**: "I do not support this proposal and am certain Ronnie would not."

■ **Paul Martin** succeeds **Jean Chrétien** as Canadian prime minister. *Washington Post* describes festivities: "The multicultural ceremony included a string ensemble's rendition of 'O Canada' and a purification ritual in which an elder from one of Canada's Indian nations dusted Martin with an eagle feather." . . . Australian prime minister **John Howard** on his opposition to ratification of Kyoto treaty: "I'm not going to a be party to something that destroys jobs and destroys the competitiveness of Australian industry." . . . In Venezuela, 3.6 million sign presidential-recall referendum in four days, but leftist president **Hugo Chavez** charges "mega-fraud."

■ **David Letterman**: "Al Gore has endorsed Howard Dean for president. That's fitting, the guy who didn't beat Bush endorsing the guy who won't beat Bush." **NR**

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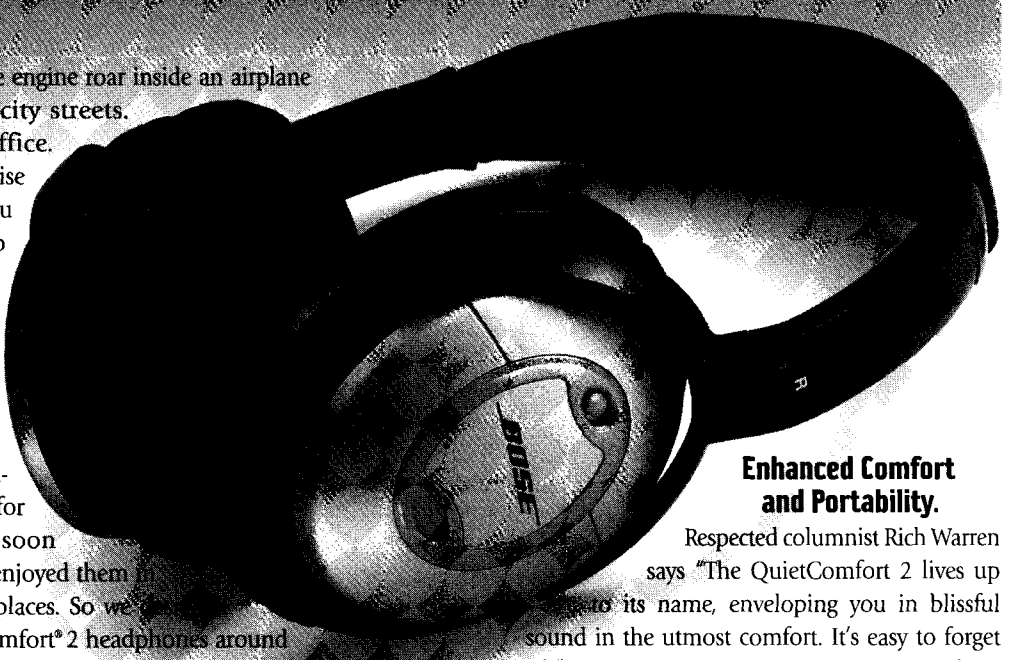

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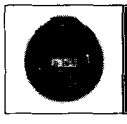

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THE WEEK

■ A reader was telling us about learning of Saddam Hussein's capture on NBC News, with Tom Brokaw: "The poor man looked disoriented, defeated, and dejected. Saddam didn't look all that great, either."

■ Governor Schwarzenegger has capitulated to the Democrats on spending. California taxpayers ended up having a shorter honeymoon with him than Maria did.

■ A student of their personal histories would not have predicted that Hillary Rodham Clinton would become a leader of the right wing of the Democratic party and Al Gore of its left. In recent years, however, Gore has moved left: in rhetoric, during the 2000 campaign, and subsequently in substance. He came out against the Patriot Act and the Iraq war, and for national health insurance—and now, he has come out for Howard Dean. Senator Clinton, meanwhile, supported both the Patriot Act and the war, and is semi-demi-publicly associated with Wesley Clark's attempt to save the Democrats from Dean. Gore's endorsement of Dean means that Hillary can no longer be considered the automatic favorite for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008. What do Gore's moves of the last three years say about him? Is the new left-populist the "real" Al Gore? Who knows? (Does he?) One possibility is that Gore reacted to Ralph Nader's campaign in 2000 by concluding that the Democrats had to move left. If that is what is going on here, then it could be that Nader has done more damage to the Democratic party than anyone realized in 2000—and that the damage is continuing to ramify.

■ We like to think that there's a strong difference between the mainstream of the Democratic party and the Loony Left—you know, the kind of Left found on the least serious campuses. But it becomes increasingly hard to perceive such a difference. Consider an ad run by the John Kerry campaign. It goes, in part, "Kerry will make energy independence a national priority so *no* American will have to fight for Mideast oil." The candidate includes a line like this in his stump speech, too. It is a breathtaking statement, with its implication that American boys are being made to shed their blood—or might be made to do so—for oil. This is a longstanding charge of the Loony Left: "No Blood for Oil!" And now that charge, or something dismayingly close to it, is a staple of mainstream Democratic politics. And that's quite apart from the fact that Kerry, like all other Democrats, opposes drilling up in Alaska, which would boost American energy independence. A sorry performance, all the way around.

■ When George W. Bush ran for president in 2000, conservatives knew he was no budget-cutter. But we did not realize that he would oversee such an extravagant growth of the federal

ROMAN GENN

leviathan. We do not begrudge the increased spending on defense and homeland security, and suspect he should have spent even more in these areas. But in each year of his presidency he has supported a major expansion of the welfare state—an education bill, a farm bill, and a prescription-drug entitlement. The White House says that it is getting domestic spending, outside of entitlements, under control. The statistics do not appear to back up this claim. But since entitlements constitute two-thirds of the budget and the president is happily expanding them, the argument could not prove much anyway. The congressional appetite for spending deserves blame. But the president has not vetoed a single spending bill, even to force Congress to send him a slightly less bloated one. The failure to wield the veto is weakening Bush's presidency, and the nation's fiscal health.

■ There is some very good news for members, and aspiring members, of the investor class: President Bush is apparently preparing to come out for "lifetime savings accounts" and "retirement savings accounts." The idea is to consolidate and liberalize existing savings vehicles such as 401(k)s and IRAs. Currently, most saving is double-taxed. You are taxed on your income. If you spend the money immediately, you pay nothing more (except sales tax on your purchase). If you save, however, you face the prospect of taxes on the interest when you withdraw the money (and, again, sales tax). So the tax code is

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biased against saving. Bush's idea is to eliminate that bias so that people who are saving for health, educational, or retirement expenses will pay taxes only once on almost all of that money. They will be taxed when they make the income in the first place, but the interest will not be taxed later. Liberal opposition to the idea is already aborning. It will cause federal revenues to fall dramatically in decades to come, they say. Maybe it will; or maybe it will stimulate so much additional saving and investment that a larger economy will throw off greater revenues. Even if revenues fall, we will have a more self-reliant citizenry that needs less from its government. Bush's savings accounts are the best thing for young investors short of Social Security reform—and they could help pave the way for it.

■ Before September 11, the Bush administration tried to push through an amnesty for illegal immigrants from Mexico—although it avoided the word "amnesty." We thought this was bad policy and bad politics. For one thing, the Democrats would easily one-up the president by calling for an amnesty for all Hispanic illegals. (They did.) But after the September 11 attacks, everyone realized the public would not stand for a relaxation of border controls. Now the idea is back. Tom Ridge suggested that we must "legalize" the millions of illegal immigrants here. We suppose we should be grateful that the fiction that this step could be confined to Mexicans has been abandoned. Ridge and his colleagues present an amnesty as sober realism: We have millions of illegals here, we are not going to deport them all, so we have no choice but to make them legal. Yet we do have other options. As Mark Krikorian has written in these pages, the illegal population suffers natural attrition as people go back home—unless the ranks of illegals are replenished by newcomers. A tightening of controls at the border will thus lead to a gradual reduction in the number of illegal immigrants in America. The question, then, is whether Washington is serious about enforcing the immigration laws. We're afraid we already know the answer to that.

■ President Bush signed the campaign-finance bill, which he clearly thought contained unconstitutional provisions, on the theory that the Supreme Court would nullify those provisions. The Court has instead followed the president in failing to do its duty. We do not doubt that much of the bill was constitutional, possibly including its vaunted ban on soft money. But the bill also regulates the purchase of political advertising. Its defenders say not to worry: The bill regulates "money," not "speech." But it regulates money under very specific circumstances: when it is used to buy advertising, when that advertising is political, when it occurs during a campaign, and when it mentions candidates. It distinguishes, that is, among types of speech, and singles out for extra regulation the very type of speech the Founders properly regarded as most important to leave alone. The legislative record makes it very clear that the bill's sponsors thought that regulating these advertisements would "raise the tenor of the debate in our elections" by discouraging "negative ads" (to quote Senator McCain). But the Constitution forbids Congress from passing laws to restrict political speech it finds inappropriate, not least because that category will overlap considerably with speech that incumbent congressmen find inconvenient. If there were ever a case for the Supreme Court to invalidate legislation, this was it. But the Court let the ad restrictions stand. As Justice Scalia noted in dissent, the Court is now more skeptical of restrictions on pornography than it is of restrictions on political speech. He wrote that it was a "sad day for the freedom of speech." Yes, and it should also be a shaming one for a majority of congressmen, the president, and five justices of the court.

■ Elaine Donnelly's Center for Military Readiness has beaten back a feminist lawsuit against it. The center believes that the Navy has been more interested in increasing the number of female aviators than in making sure they are fit to fly—and that this practice has risked both military effectiveness and women's lives. The issue came to public attention in October 1994, when Lt. Kara Hultgreen, an F-14 pilot, died while attempting a carrier landing. In 1995, the center issued a report citing training records to establish that the Navy was treating its other female F-14 pioneer, Carey Lohrenz, with a double standard. Lohrenz sued. A Navy investigation concluded that the report's facts were "largely accurate." A later Navy report confirmed that Lohrenz was removed from carrier aviation because her flying was "unsafe, undisciplined, and unpredictable." A federal district court's dismissal of the suit was reaffirmed when an appeals court found that the training record did indeed support Donnelly's claim "that the Navy made special accommodations for Lt. Lohrenz." Donnelly's opponents hoped that the lawsuit would silence her. They have failed. Donnelly continues to demand that the armed forces maintain uncompromising standards. The feminists did, however, succeed in depleting her organization's modest resources. Donations can be sent to the Center for Military Readiness, P.O. Box 51600, Livonia, MI 48151.

■ The Pentagon announced that bids on $18.6 billion in Iraqi reconstruction contracts would be restricted to firms from nations that helped liberate the country, whereupon four excluded nations—France, Germany, Russia, and Canada—bitched. The timing was supposedly maladroit, since the announcement came just as utility infielder James Baker was about to ask Saddam's creditors to forgive billions in Iraqi debt. But, lo, Baker won agreement from France and Germany to work toward debt relief anyway. Perhaps excluding them from the reconstruction contracts was a more effective negotiating tactic than the president's critics care to admit.

■ The London *Sunday Telegraph* ran a potentially monumental story on December 14: "Terrorist behind September 11 strike was trained by Saddam," by Con Coughlin. Coughlin reports that Iraq's provisional government has obtained a memo to Saddam from Tahir Jalil Habbush al-Tikriti, his former head of intelligence, dated July 1, 2001, on Mohamed Atta's activities during a three-day stay in Baghdad. Habbush said that Atta was understudying with one of Saddam's many guests, Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal, and displaying "extraordinary effort": He would be "responsible for attacking the targets that we have agreed to destroy." Two months later, Atta destroyed the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Some time before the American invasion of Iraq, Nidal was murdered in Baghdad, perhaps to cover Saddam's tracks. The

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THE WEEK...

images of Saddam as hobo would naturally have driven this story below the fold of page one, but shouldn't it have gotten some significant coverage? (Kudos to bloggers and to columnist William Safire for tugging it across the Atlantic.)

■ "Baghdad Bob," Saddam Hussein's disinformation minister, may have been forced to surrender his stranglehold on international media months ago, but the journalists might not have gotten the memo. When an antiterrorism rally was held throughout Iraq in early December, there were only a few mentions of it on the wires, in the newspapers, and on cable television. When it was reported on, the numbers and significance were both downplayed. But not to worry: The Iraqi bloggers were there, reporting with pride as they marched alongside their fellow freedom-seekers. They estimated at least 10,000 taking to the streets in various cities and wondered where the *New York Times* front-page photos were as they uploaded their own digital shots on their websites from newly opened Internet cafés. One blogger asked, "Imagine if half or even a quarter of that number were demonstrating against the war or against the occupation. What do you think would have happened? Would the media ignore it?" It is with enthusiasm and gratitude that we welcome Iraq's entry into the world wide web of alternative media.

■ Chen Shui-bian, the president of Taiwan, is up for re-election next spring. He has proposed holding, at the same time as the election, a referendum in which Taiwan's voters will have the opportunity to call on China to renounce the use of force against the island nation. Soon after this became known, President Bush emerged from a meeting with Communist Chinese prime minister Wen Jiabao to reprove the Taiwan leader for his referendum suggestion. The administration, said Bush, opposes any attempt to change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. This led to much hyperventilating over here on the political right, with words like "appeasement" and "sell-out" being thrown around rather freely. Yet Bush's words did not indicate any substantive change in the U.S. position on China-Taiwan, and we are much in need of China's help in dealing with the appalling and extremely dangerous problem of North Korea. Taiwan is *de facto* an independent nation. In her internal affairs, and in matters of trade, she is as free as any nation in this globalized world—freer, it might be argued, than the average member of the European Union. She was no less secure after Bush's remarks than before them. President Chen's referendum, if carried out, will achieve nothing practical, other than the letting off of steam. That Taiwan cannot proclaim her nationhood out loud for fear of vexing the Chinese Communist party is certainly very deplorable. There are, however, rather a lot of deplorable things going on in the world right now, and our government has to weigh greater evils against lesser ones. We are at war, and cannot be too fastidious in our dealings. If China's cooperation over North Korea can be secured by a mild reproof to what many, even in Taiwan, believe to be an ill-considered election stunt, that is a price we should be willing to pay.

■ The European Union consists of 15 members, due to rise next May to 25. All these states naturally have their interests, and none of the politicians can envisage how to reconcile conflicts among them, as things stand. The solution they come up with is a federation that will eradicate as far as possible the characteristics of the constituent nation-states. To that end, a team of experts under former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has been laboring for two years to devise a federal constitution. On December 12, heads of state came together in Brussels to ratify acceptance of the document that emerged, which gave Europe among many other things a legal entity, a supreme court, a foreign and defense policy, and a president. Countries with weak identities like Belgium or Luxembourg are eager for this new format. In contrast, Poland and Spain have strong identities, and are not prepared to compromise them very far. The discussion in Brussels turned on technicalities, but the substance was the unwillingness of Poland and Spain to take a truly subordinate place in a federation run by France and Germany. Nothing was ratified, and all the politicians went home bad-tempered to struggle with explanations to electorates who are indifferent to these antics, bewildered by them, or outright hostile. In a phrase President Reagan was fond of, you ain't seen nothing yet.

■ Twenty years from now, according to demographers, around a quarter of the French population will be Muslim. It's not inconceivable that France will one day be a Muslim country. With this possibility in the back of the mind, a commission of 20 religious leaders, teachers, politicians, and sociologists has just presented a long-awaited report to President Jacques Chirac in favor of asserting the country's traditional separation of church and state. This turns on the wearing of head scarves by Muslim girls in schools. Who says the French aren't sticklers for detail? In point of fact, the Koran has nothing to say on the subject of the head scarf, and the whole kerfuffle about it was lately devised in Tehran by Ayatollah Khomeini to raise Muslim consciousness. But by now Muslim girls in France are using head scarves to assert separatist identities. It would never do to offend them, so to appease the potential ban on the Muslim head scarf this report proposes also to ban the wearing in school of large crosses for Christians, and of course skull caps for Jews. This ban may well backfire, inflaming the very

SADDAM, BAGGED

Sure, there was gloom in Mudville
When Casey fanned the plate;
Among the courtiers, too, when
The Manchus met their fate.
And while, unter den Linden,
Gloom vies with glum Paree,
Nobody's eyes look bloodshot as
Pols' at the DNC.

—W. H. VON DREELE

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Smaller target, better job

Paul T. Hill is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution; a member of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and a research professor and acting dean at the University of Washington's Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs.

In many cities the job of school superintendent offers all the satisfactions of the town spear catcher. Able people often leave the job pierced in soul if not in body. Cities such as Seattle and Portland can get qualified men and women to apply for the job but can't keep applicants interested long enough to hire anyone.

A few hardy souls, such as Boston's Tom Payzant and San Diego's Alan Bersin, hang in there. But most superintendents either quit in frustration or are fired when school boards that can't settle on anything else agree that the superintendent is no good.

Superintendents are not all equally well prepared or skillful, but the problem is more with the job than with the people. School superintendents are expected to keep everyone happy, even such groups as parents of gifted and disadvantaged children who are in a zero-sum competition for money. They are supposed to maintain a warm, fuzzy relationship with teachers whose unions are constantly undercutting reform efforts and grabbing any new money that becomes available for salaries and smaller class sizes. They are supposed to get results out of a district central office, many of whose staff members are tenured lifers or have their own power bases in local churches, neighborhoods, and political clubs.

Superintendents are ultimately fired or driven to distraction by school boards, which do a wonderful job of representing all the conflicts and confusions that exist in their communities. It's hard to see how school boards as constituted can do anything else: they too face fractured communities and incompatible demands. But unlike the superintendent they have somebody on whom they can take out their frustrations

Education insiders keep searching for a mutant strain of individuals who can succeed under these circumstances. But the real problem is with the jobs themselves, both of superintendent and of school board member.

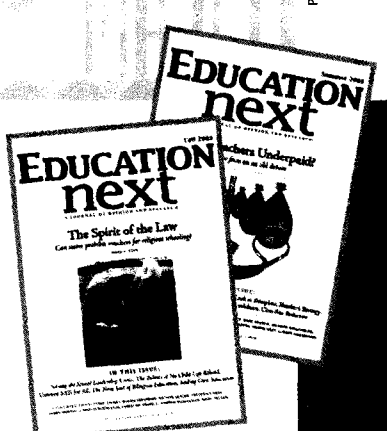
These jobs are setups. Superintendents and school board members are expected to take responsibility for things that they can't influence because state and federal regulations and collective bargaining agreements stand in the way. The scope of the superintendents' nominal powers—hiring all the teachers, spending all the money, choosing all the books, managing all the buses—is so great that every kind of conflict or grievance comes straight to them.

The key to making superintendent and school board jobs doable is to refine the excessive powers and duties to the few that matter, such as focusing on charter schools rather than hiring teachers, holding schools accountable for children's learning instead of dealing with grievances, sending dollars to the schools that parents choose in place of fiddling with centrally administered budgets, withdrawing support from schools that do not teach effectively, developing new schools to replace failed ones, and letting parents choose among schools rather than trying to make the best of a bad family-school match.

Superintendents and school boards can trade in grandiose roles for simpler but more consequential ones and catch a lot fewer spears in the bargain.

— Paul T. Hill

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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—Dean Rieck,
Direct Marketing magazine
April 2000

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The Signing of the Declaration of Independence, detail, by John Trumbull.

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THE WEEK...

religious tensions it is meant to diminish. Besides, the girls actually look rather fetching in their scarves and know it.

■ "This day we fight!" yells Aragorn as his outnumbered soldiers confront an army of vile orcs. "I bid you stand, men of the West!" These words, shouted in the new movie *The Return of the King*, capture much of what is great about the now-complete film trilogy of J. R. R. Tolkien's epic novel *The Lord of the Rings*. There's the grim determination to defend freedom from those who would take it away, an inspiring display of courage in the face of long odds, and some wonderfully un-PC language. Did anybody in Hollywood try to edit the script to read "*people* of the West"? Tolkien wrote one of the best-loved books of the 20th century, and it's imbued with ideas and principles that conservatives continue to hold dear. Many of them have found their way onto the silver screen in director Peter Jackson's faithful rendition. A story set in a fantasy world of wizards and elves may not appeal to everybody, but Tolkien and Jackson have shown us that it has much to teach us.

■ Over in London's Tate Gallery it is time once again for the annual Turner Prize for the year's most outstanding and important artwork. This year's winning artist is Grayson/Claire Perry, a transvestite potter with a strong line in pornographic and pedophile imagery. Mr. or, as the case may be, Ms. Perry's pots are traditionally shaped, but his, or her, decorative motifs include scenes of child abuse, erotica, and "angry social comment." Well, you're not much of an artist if you're not angry, are you? Runners-up for the prize included a tableau of two inflatable dolls engaged in an act of sexual congress, a mock-up of some mutilated corpses being consumed by maggots, and a bronze tree with rotting apples hanging from its branches. By their fruits ye shall know them.

■ In education matters, President Leon Botstein of Bard College is our kind of liberal. He is starting a master's-degree program for prospective high-school teachers designed to address a widespread complaint that teachers do not know enough about the subjects they teach. In Botstein's words, "The education schools in the United States have had an unfortunate stranglehold on teacher training, and they have created a pseudo-science in pedagogy and wasted the time of future teachers by not deepening the knowledge that future teachers need." At Bard, the teachers of tomorrow will take as many courses in the subjects they will teach as in pedagogy. We can think of only one hitch: The standard ed schools have the support of the unions, which in turn often control state-qualification requirements. This barrier will have to be dealt with. That aside, we say, "Bravo, maestro."

■ A student of film at New York University wished to do a project that involved filming two actors engaged in sexual intercourse in front of her class. Her professor was of course fine with the idea, but the university administration denied permission for the project. Naturally, the New York Civil Liberties Union was outraged by that denial: "Students should be able to make films . . . without their university acting as a moral censor," sputtered the NYCLU spokesman. Replied a representative of the university administration: "Someone give me a list of universities that allow sex acts in the classroom. We're not going to be the first." Oh, that's just what we need—for someone to make a game of "dare" out of it.

■ This past year 78 bears have attempted to break into homes in New Jersey, with 58 of the attempts being successful. Dozens of bears have been struck on the state's highways, farm livestock have been killed by bears, and Garden State suburbanites have encountered bears rummaging through their trash cans. Democratic governor James E. McGreevey eventually authorized a six-day bear hunt, the first for three decades in the state. This, inevitably, outraged several loyal Democratic constituencies: the Sierra Club, the Humane Society, and an outfit named the Bear Education and Resource (BEAR) Group. This controversy is part of a larger nationwide issue that includes other "charismatic megafauna"—mountain lions in California, wolves in Montana—that have been left alone to breed for the last few years, and which are now beginning to make a nuisance of themselves to civilized folk. The bear-huggers of New Jersey might just want to keep in mind the sad story of Timothy Treadwell, a Californian who spent his summers communing with bears in Alaska. Treadwell wrote a sappy book about his ursine friends, whom he awarded pet names such as "Cupcake," "Mr. Chocolate," and "Booble." This happy idyll came to an abrupt end in October this year, when one of the bears, perhaps tired of being patronized, ate both Mr. Treadwell and his girlfriend and trashed their camp.

■ Ronald Reagan led the supply-side revolution, but let us not forget those who fought with him. One such fighter was William V. Roth Jr., the five-term Republican senator from Delaware who co-sponsored the 1981 Kemp-Roth tax bill that helped usher in the Reagan cuts. He went on to decry wasteful spending of the $640-toilet-seat variety, and to create the Roth IRA, which allows one to invest taxable income and withdraw it, tax-free, upon retirement. In addition to his tenure in the Senate, Roth spent four years in the House and fought in World War II. His 82-year life, which ended on Dec. 13, was one of continual service and high achievement. R.I.P.

AT WAR

Captured

. . . on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things . . .

THE visage of the modern tyrant, plucked from his spider hole, is still lively. Nevertheless we savor the all-too-rare spectacle of a brute brought low, and brought to justice.

The pithiest tribute to the American soldiers who caught

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Saddam Hussein was delivered by the captive himself, when a member of the Iraqi Governing Council asked scornfully why he had not gone down fighting, as he had so often pledged. Indicating the GIs guarding him, Saddam asked, "Would you fight these men?" He should have asked that question before he provoked their country.

Saddam's trial should be fair, soon, and swift, run by Iraqis, who were his chief victims. His crimes should be spelled out, to the world and to his face; his denials noted and dismissed; and the supreme penalty imposed. No escapable Elba, no endless Spandau for him. The world judicial system has no role to play. Since his crimes against humanity were committed primarily in his own country, other nations—especially including those that defended him to the last—should step aside.

President Bush noted that "the capture of Saddam does not mean the end of violence in Iraq." The foreign jihadists with whom Saddam long cooperated and who have swarmed into the country since his fall may become even more vindictive and desperate. The United States should continue to profit from the lessons in counterinsurgency learned by the British in Malaya and by the Israelis today. Developing local intelligence and sealing off suspected areas worked well in this case. We should train the Iraqi army and police force in these techniques, as well as guarantee them good pay and a proud status. They are on the firing line now too, and will continue to be so after we have gone.

Though Saddam's capture does not preempt the tasks ahead,

Nice Goin', Uncle Sam

P. J. O'Rourke famously quipped, "If you think health care is expensive now, wait until government gives it away for free." The just-enacted half-trillion-dollar Medicare prescription-drug benefit expands the government's role in health care more than any other measure since the inception of Medicare and Medicaid. Will cost-containment features in the bill restrain medical expenses, as the White House and other Republican supporters predict? The medical savings accounts will help make patients more cost-conscious, to be sure. But don't hope that a bigger government role in health care will lead to lower bills. It was precisely the intrusion of government into the health-care arena that caused stampeding inflation of medical costs in the first place.

According to Department of Labor consumer-price index (CPI) data, since the creation of Medicare in the mid 1960s the health-care component of the CPI has grown at roughly twice the rate of economy-wide inflation. But in the 15 years prior to Uncle Sam's taking on the role of health insurer, medical inflation grew at about the same rate as inflation in other sectors of the economy.

There are only two industries in America today that suffer from rampant inflation: health care and education. In virtually all other sectors of the economy, prices are relatively stable, or even falling. So why do prices in these two industries gallop out of control? In both cases, government plays a domineering role. The marketplaces in education and health care are dysfunctional because consumers don't have much incentive to discriminate on the basis of price.

Medical patients, who as recently as 1960 paid about two-thirds of their expenses out of pocket, now pay only about 16 percent. A Cato Institute study shows that services covered by Medicare and private insurance (like hospital stays and basic physician services) have much higher rates of inflation than medical services not generally covered (such as dental care and cosmetic surgery).

In education, inflation-adjusted costs per pupil at public elementary and high schools tripled, from $2,500 to $7,500, between 1960 and 2000—even as test scores fell.

Meanwhile, every parent of teens knows that exploding college-tuition costs have put an enormous dent in family finances, as double-digit rates of inflation have become the norm at most universities. In a rational world, universities would exploit savings from the Information Age economy in order to cut the cost of learning. Instead, the states and Uncle Sam have stepped in and picked up the tab for college students, so that today about three of every four dollars in tuition are paid with loans, financial-aid grants, tax-free savings accounts, scholarships, and tens of billions of dollars in direct subsidies to universities.

One insidious consequence of hyperinflation in these industries is that those without government support are being priced out of the market. A four-year stint at Harvard now costs a family $160,000. Annual health-insurance costs for an average family of four have skyrocketed from $4,500 a year in 1998 to just less than $9,000 a year in 2003. No wonder there are now 43 million people without insurance.

Ironically, calls for federally funded free tuition and a complete government takeover of medicine are becoming more persistent, even though it is government's insistence on paying a bigger share of the bills that has made schools and doctor services more expensive than ever. P. J. O'Rourke was depressingly prescient: Free government health care and education are on the way, and pretty soon no one will be able to afford either.

—Stephen Moore

Where There Is Government, There Is Inflation

$ $ $	CPI	Increase in Health Insurance Costs	Increase in University Tuition
1998	2%	5%	3%
1999	3%	5%	8%
2000	3%	9%	5%
2001	3%	10%	5%
2002	1%	11%	6%
2003	2%	16% (projected)	Unavailable
2004	2%	12% (projected)	Unavailable
1960-2000	480%	1050%	1520%

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics for CPI; Towers Perrin for employer health costs; and National Center for Education Statistics for education costs, 1998–2002; Eric A. Hanushek for 1960–2000 education costs.

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it will make many of them easier. The disappearance of any prospect of a restoration will dispirit Baathists, and encourage men of good will. Both will be more willing to provide information about guerrillas, and about Saddam's secrets, including terror links and WMD. Saddam's fall is also a lesson to neighboring despots, that is, to most of his neighbors. They had already learned they could lose wars and power; now they know they can lose their dignity and their lives, if they press us too hard. Pathetic as well as wicked are those Palestinians who mourn Saddam as their champion. When will they learn that such patronage gets them nothing?

At home, Democrats coped with the awkward task of running against a president who is seeing a difficult job through. The Oliver Stone prize went to Rep. Jim McDermott (Wash.), who wondered if bagging Saddam hadn't been timed deliberately to help Bush. The presidential candidates were better than that—somewhat. Howard Dean, in a speech to the Pacific Council on International Policy, said that "the capture of Saddam has not made America safer." Joe Lieberman, reclaiming his spine from storage, accused Dean of being in "his own spider hole of denial." If Howard Dean were president, Saddam Hussein would still be president. If any of the other Democrats were president, would they have summoned the will to topple Saddam, whatever their intentions?

A curse has been lifted, a threat has been ended. The war goes on.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The next issue of NATIONAL REVIEW will appear in three weeks.

notes & asides

■ Dear Mr. Buckley: No one challenged a headline in your Sept. 1 issue: "The Kids Aren't Alright." My not-so-new *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* snarls, "The form ALRIGHT, though often used, is not recognized by authorities as proper." Have the authorities relented?

Sincerely,
Arlene Hamm
Fishkill, N.Y.

Dear Ms. Hamm: No, nor have we. The word (alright) was used to make a point. I would tell you what that point was, if I remembered it.

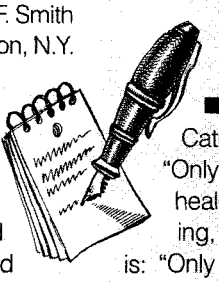
Cordially, WFB

■ Dear Mr. Buckley: I enjoyed the cover article (April 7) on neoconservatives (or neo-conservatives?), but the editing really confused and distracted me. Most uses of the word "neoconservative," including the cover blurb, were spelled without a hyphen. At least one use inside the article clearly contained a hyphen. Many others were ambiguous, as the hyphen was there, but the word was broken across lines, so it wasn't clear whether the hyphen was there by reason of spelling or line break.

I almost concluded that the one instance of a clearly hyphenated usage was simply a mistake, when I hit the sentence referring to "hyphenated conservatives." That jumped out and smacked me in the eye! It certainly made the meaning unclear, as some other flavors of "hyphenated conservatives" were indeed hyphenated in the text, but some were not. Just who ARE those hyphenated folks? And what does that hyphenization mean?

Comments? I don't recall this subject being covered in depth in my English classes, and I am quite uncertain on the issue. What are your rules re hyphenation? (Or is it hyphenization? My dictionary lists both words, but does not distinguish between them. I admit that sometimes one word just "feels better" than the other, but I cannot articulate why.)

Regards,
June F. Smith
Kingston, N.Y.



Dear Ms. Smith: Here is one sentence on the subject from *The Chicago Manual of Style* (7.84). More on the subject is there which you can consult ad lib. Meanwhile: "The trend toward closed compounds. With frequent use, open or hyphenated compounds tend to become closed (on line to on-line to online). *Chicago*'s [i.e., *The Chicago Manual of Style*, to which NR mostly adheres] general adherence to *Webster* [*Webster's Dictionary* gives its own choices in the matter of hyphenation of individual compound words] does not preclude occasional exceptions [taken by *Chicago*] when the closed spellings have become widely accepted, pronunciation and readability are not at stake, and keystrokes can be saved."

Cordially, WFB

■ Dear Mr. Buckley: In *Spytime*, "John McCone . . . always managed to travel on the other side of the Beltway." Was the Beltway built when this takes place, in 1961? And if so, was there a distinction at that time on who was inside or outside the Beltway?

Bennett B. Smith
Wilmington, Del.

Dear Mr. Smith: Good question, raising the larger question of anachronistic opportunizing, e.g. "the slums of Rome," "the jet-speed of the King's couriers." We'll have to think about that one!

Cordially, WFB

■ Dear Mr. Buckley: At the Catholic Mass there is the phrase: "Only say the Word and I shall be healed." I believe the proper wording, noting Who will be the Sayer, is: "Only say the Word and I will be healed." Comment?

Sincerely yours,
John E. Reith
Wilmington, Del.

Dear Mr. Reith: You make a good and interesting point.
Thanks,

—WFB

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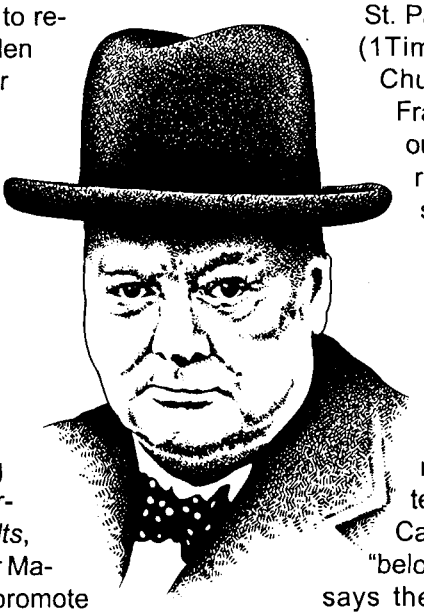
Orthodox Catholics Shall Never Surrender

There have been many inspiring initiatives taken by orthodox Catholics lately in the areas of education, publishing, TV, radio, the Internet, and vocations, but liberal Catholics still control most of the levers of power and influence in the U.S. Church. It's still rare to hear a sermon forthrightly opposing abortion, contraception, premarital sex, homosexuality, consumerism, or pornography. Vatican efforts to restore reverence to the liturgy have fallen on deaf ears. The wreckovation of our churches and cathedrals continues apace, with new monstrosities being built from scratch. The decade-long effort by the Holy See to re-Catholicize our institutions of higher learning has been sabotaged.



The sexual perversion in the priesthood and episcopate has hardly been dealt with. Although there is a strong policy on the sexual abuse of *minors* (nevertheless obstructed by certain bishops), nothing has been done about homosexual clerics who are sexually active with *adults*, including fellow clerics. The Lavender Mafia, where homosexuals protect and promote their own, is still riding high.

Moreover, liberal Catholics are confident of victory because they have the full force of the *Zeitgeist* — our decadent Western culture — on their side.

Yes, we orthodox Catholics still have our backs to the wall. *But so what?* St. Athanasius had his back to the wall. So did St. Thomas More. And so did Winston Churchill at the beginning of World War II. None of them capitulated. A mere 18 days before the fall of France, Churchill said that even if all the Continent should fall to the Axis powers, "We shall not flag or fail.... We shall fight in the seas and oceans...we shall fight on the beaches...we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender...."

The struggle ahead is difficult. We know that many loyal Catholics feel beset on all sides — outmanned, outgunned, isolated. That too was Britain's plight. She stood alone. But she did not flinch — and she prevailed.

St. Paul urges us to "fight the good fight" (1Tim. 6:12). And so, to paraphrase Churchill on the day after the fall of France, let us orthodox Catholics brace ourselves against those who collaborate with the *Zeitgeist* and let us so steel ourselves for victory that even a thousand years from now men will say, *This was their finest hour.*

To get yourself in fighting trim, you must read the NEW OXFORD REVIEW, an orthodox Catholic monthly magazine that candidly addresses all the problems in the Church — and takes no prisoners. We're "Catholicism's intellectual prizefighter," says the ace Catholic apologist Karl Keating, and we "belong in every loyal Catholic's arsenal," says the indomitable Fr. Joseph Fessio. Among those who've written for us are Walker Percy, James Hitchcock, Alice von Hildebrand, Fr. Stanley L. Jaki, and Michael S. Rose (whose book *Goodbye, Good Men* stirred up a hornets' nest).

We shall never surrender, and we shall prevail. The Barque of Peter is in violently turbulent waters and is assailed on all sides, but we are assured by our Lord that the Gates of Hell will never swallow her. *Semper fluctibus agitata et semper victrix* ("always tossed about by the waves and always victorious").

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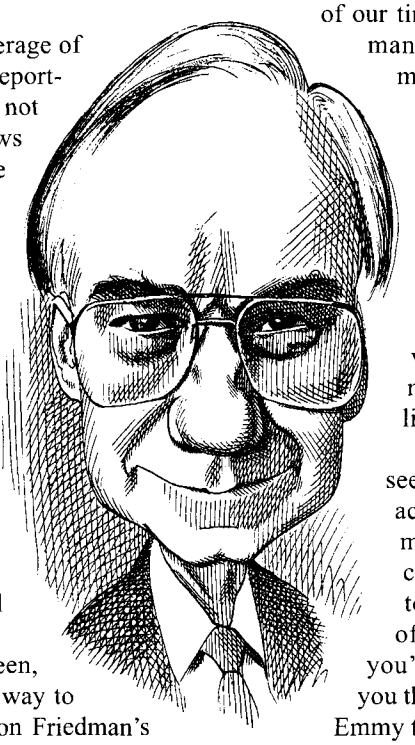
Robert L. Bartley

Robert L. Bartley, the longtime and transformational editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, died on December 10. Seven days before, he had received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In October 2001, National Review held a dinner for him, to honor him in his retirement. Below are excerpts from speeches made that night.

Daniel Oliver

Bob Bartley has been the editor of the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* since 1972. For almost 30 years he has made that page a source of knowledge and inspiration, and a crusading force for, most especially, a robust foreign policy and supply-side economics. He has opened our eyes to the manifest accomplishments of the invisible hand and to the mailed and regulatory fist of Leviathan. For his labors we are grateful.



As has been remarked in the media coverage of Mr. Bartley's impending retirement, the reporting and tone of the editorial pages have not always been in sync with the *Journal*'s news pages. I myself was made acutely aware of that in 1986 when I was President Reagan's chairman of the Federal Trade Commission. The first paper to criticize me was—the *Wall Street Journal*. It noted on its front page that after only six weeks of my being chairman, the FTC was "dead in the water." My friends used to ask me, "Dan, how did you do it so fast?"—and then they would ask how I managed to get the news item planted on Page One of the *Wall Street Journal*. I'll never tell; and Mr. Bartley and I will take that secret to our graves—after which Bob Woodward can tell you all about it.

Mr. Bartley's guiding principle has been, "Free people, free markets." That's a nice way to put it, and reminds us of the title of Milton Friedman's book, *Free to Choose*. Free people and free markets go together so well—like liberals and taxes, both of which might be in shorter supply if even more people read Mr. Bartley's pages.

Christopher Buckley

I first met Bob at the National Review anniversary dinner in 1985. At this grand occasion, I saw on the program that I would be seated next to him. I was overcome with nervousness; I had worked in the previous years in the White House, where the *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages were taken as Holy Scripture, and now I was about to have several hours of close proximity to The Great Bob Bartley.

In something very close to panic, I sought guidance during the cocktail hour from someone I knew who was close to him personally. What was he like? I asked. What topics of conversation should I pursue? Did he have any hobbies? This person, who shall remain nameless, but whom, at the time, I underestimated, took in my distress and suavely replied, "Oh, not to worry. He's casual as can be. A great one for small talk. And he loves—*loves*—above all things in life—a really good off-color joke. As for hobbies, not many people know about it, but he has this thing for soap opera. He tapes them and watches them at night. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of *As the World Turns* and *Guiding Light*. Get him going on soap opera and you'll have to stuff a napkin in his mouth to shut him up."

I was greatly relieved by this intelligence. I would be spending the dinner hour not only with one of the great minds of our time, but also, clearly, with a regular guy, a man of the common touch. Indeed I found myself wishing I knew more about soap opera. Presently I found myself at Table 38 with the great man.

I found him entirely pleasant, if not quite the bubbly small-talker I had been told to expect. Perhaps it had been a hard day at the office. So I awaited my chance. As soon as my wife and Edith Bartley were engaged in their own conversation, I leaned over and said, "So, how many lesbians does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

His reception of my little *jeu d'esprit* seemed somewhat muted. I put it down to the acoustics of the Grand Ballroom. When the main course had been served, I seized my chance to engage him in something I knew to be close to his heart. And in full hearing of all at the table, I said, "So, Bob, I hear you're a great aficionado of soap opera. Do you think Susan Lucci will finally win a daytime Emmy this year?" Again his response struck me as muted. Indeed, quite so. He looked at me owlishly, with an expression of seven-eighths disdain and one-eighth contempt, as if he had been suddenly thrust into the company of someone prematurely released from an asylum for the mentally feeble. My wife, who at the time worked for the CIA and was adept at evaluating disastrous situations, kicked me under the table.

Thus began—and ended—my long personal association with Robert Bartley.

After the dinner was over, I sought out the person who had given me the pre-dinner briefing. I found him hiding in a bathroom stall, convulsed in hysterics. I shot him, and disposed of the body in what is now the Meadowlands Sports Complex.

ROMAN GENN

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1937–2003

And yet as I look back upon it, I'm somewhat grateful to the fellow. If he hadn't given me that meretricious briefing, I probably would have attempted to engage the Great Man conversationally in such matters as the Laffer Curve or David Stockman. And no doubt he would have found my offerings on those issues banal. This way I can at least look back and say that for a brief, if not shining, moment, I had the whole of Robert Bartley's attention. We connected. If he himself has no recollection of it—having put it out of his mind long ago—I do, a vivid one, and it remains somehow one of the great moments of my life, rococo, improbable, proud. I feel like the tumbler in the medieval tale who, amidst all the wise and scholarly monks, had only his one small talent to offer up, and performed his humble and awkward obeisance. But seldom do I get the chance to play the fool so gladly, or with such awe and respect.

David Frum

Perhaps you know the joke about the family whose youngest child is apparently mute. In every other respect the child is normal—even precocious: He reads, rides a bike, does well in school. But for eight years, the child says not a word—until one night at dinner, he suddenly announces: "This soup is cold." His parents gasp: "You can talk!" He answers, "Of course I can talk." "But why didn't you speak until now?" "Until now, the soup was fine."

I think this story gives us some insight into Bob Bartley. Alumni of his page often gather to tell stories about his famous silences. Seth Lipsky once delighted a group like this by holding up an editorial he'd written on which Bob had ticked a small checkmark and written the single word "Good." This was, said Seth, the only compliment he had received from Bob in 15 years of working for him.

But look at it from Bob's point of view. His writers naturally assume that Bob is choking back a torrent of compliments—a vast reservoir of unspoken approbation. Bob may see it differently. He may see himself as a more positive version of the boy in the soup story. His writers serve up inadequate editorial after inadequate editorial. He kindly lets them pass without comment. Finally, after years of trying, one of them produces one he sort of likes. At last! Hot soup! *Checkmark!*

Bob took his job at a time when liberty at home and abroad was in graver danger than at any time since 1941—when so unexcitable a witness as Alan Greenspan could testify to Congress that the United States had reached a point of no return between socialism and freedom; when a Republican president had frozen wages and prices and a Democratic Congress abandoned a fighting ally to Communism; when our European allies were quailing before Soviet missiles and Arab oil princes were claiming the lordship of the earth; when a dollar melted in the wallet like ice cream on a hot day and the U.S. government helped itself to up to 70 percent of one's earnings.

Bob roared into the fight with gleeful ferocity. And he won. He changed the country, and he changed the newspaper business. Over the past 25 years, an extraordinary cohort of conservative writers passed through Bartley's domain. He gave them opportunities at a time when the rest of the major media were quarantined against them.

When a man keeps his own counsel, he is sometimes said to be a man of few words. That's not Bob. He is a man of millions of words. He just waits to deploy them when and where they will do the most good. He is a great fighter, a great patriot, and the greatest newspaperman any of us will ever know.

WFB

It is a great pleasure to read, in Robert Bartley's celebration of the Seven Fat Years brought on by economic policies associated with President Reagan, his account of the evolution of the idea of supply-side, accomplished bit by bit at myriad lunches at a little restaurant downtown—Michael 1, it's called—which seems to have served as the Garrick Club of Wall Street. There they met to reify their insight, to distill supply-side and explore its ramifications. The crystallization of those insights was once described by John Kenneth Galbraith. Supply-side economics, he wrote, was deduced from a curve sketched by Arthur Laffer, on a napkin, or a piece of toilet paper, whichever, normally put to better use. In a televised exchange on the subject, done in Miami in 1972 when we were reporting on the Democratic Convention, the Laffer Curve came up. I volunteered my own definition, which was that supply-side economics is the perception that economically valuable activity is generated by diminished taxation, regulation, and other impediments to commerce. He nodded his head condescendingly and told our audience on the *Today* show that all this was in any case irrelevant, given the predictable victory next November of Candidate George McGovern; wherein Professor Galbraith established that his vaticinations in politics were as reliable as those in economics.

It isn't the supply-side epiphany that memorializes the career of Bob Bartley at the *Wall Street Journal*. His achievement was cumulative. Day by day, year by year, he showed his lively intelligence, and gave us his stylish defense of freedom, exploring its implications. He stood by convictions arrived at by research and analysis, and advanced a civilized integration of major human events into the democratic moral scene.

The day will never come when the singular cast of Bob Bartley's 30 years will lose its special character, and the day won't come—certainly not in my lifetime—when studied reflection on the contributions of Bartley to right reason, and on his lovely expressions of it, will incur anything less than the gratitude we express here tonight.

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■ AT WAR ■

Death of a Fantasy

Everything Saddam Hussein built up, in utter collapse

DAVID PRYCE-JONES

THE capture of Saddam Hussein draws a line under Operation Free Iraq. It is now possible to concentrate on the task of building the country's future, and discovering whether democracy will take hold in the Arab Middle East, and if so, how and in what form.

More than a distraction, as long as Saddam was at liberty he represented the alternative of absolute power, as well as a symbol of defiance. Here was a figurehead around whom those Muslims who hate the United States and its allies could rally. Islamists, Iraqi nationalists, and their supporters on the international left ardently believed that while he was in hiding he was also directing a glorious resistance movement. Swirling around him was the glamour of the outlaw.

An attractive quality of Arabs is their admiration of courage. If one day professional rather than politicized officers were to lead them, they would prove formidable soldiers. Suicide bombers are widely admired because they seem to exemplify courage in some superhuman sphere beyond the limit that rational people can understand. Saddam played with virtuosity on this cultural trait, magnifying the bravery and heroic status of all Iraqis, himself above all. He threatened to wage the Mother of All Battles, and promised to die fighting at the head of his troops. Never, he said, would he be a deserter.

Dictators create the fantasy world in which they force everyone to live. Hitler fantasized about race, and Stalin about class. Saddam learned from them both—in method, especially—but essentially his was a fantasy about absolute power. Iraq could and should have been a medium-rank nation, with resources enough to guarantee peace and prosperity for all its inhabitants. Saddam instead imagined himself the heir of Nebuchadnezzar and Saladin, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, the hero who had only to conquer Iran and Kuwait and Israel, and beyond that unify the entire Arab world under him. Like all such fantasies, its strength lay in its untruthfulness, its one-dimensional simplicity. Fascinatingly, he had writers publish novels in his name, in which absolute power was presented as the solution to all ills.

Reality-enforcement comes as something of an anti-climax in contrast to the vivid fantasy it explodes. Saddam, who smoked the best Havana cigars in the faces of colleagues he was condemning to summary execution, and who ordered silk suits by the score from his Armenian tailor, was discovered by American soldiers in a ramshackle hole dug under a mud outbuilding on a farm not far from his birthplace. Although he had a revolver with him, he emerged with his hands up, looking like a hobo but nonetheless boasting to his captors that he was the President of Iraq. He did not match the resolution of his two sons, who fought to the end, nor did he spare himself the indignity of capture by putting a bullet in his head. Hitler in his own bunker had at least made that final statement.

Like everybody else, the Arab and Muslim world has watched those clips of film showing a Coalition medico examining his beard for lice, and probing into his mouth, perhaps in search of a cyanide capsule, perhaps to take a DNA swab. The disgrace of it could hardly be more complete. In Muslim society, a beard signifies piety; and a stranger who so much as touches another man's beard insults him. For a long time to come, the Arab and Muslim world will be coming to terms with the searing memory of that examination, every detail of which goes against its core values.

In common with other dictators, Saddam did everything to ensure that he would be taken at his word, and that peo-

MAURICIO LIMA/AFP

Mr. Pryce-Jones is an NR senior editor. His book *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* was recently reissued.

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ple would come to accept his fantasy as reality. His many palaces and gigantic monuments to himself, the mass graves and hundreds of thousands of victims, were expressions of his absolute power. The values of that society, as he well understood, conflated honor and power. People of course knew that he was cruel and unjust, the latest in the run of dictators under whom they have suffered during so much of their history, but they also perceived that he was doing deeds of which they themselves were incapable. Seemingly he was defying the West, that is to say the Christians and the Jews, and so standing up for Muslims. The honor he acquired was therefore a complex blend of admiration, resentment, and fear; he was both monster and champion, in any case altogether larger than life. The term these admirers used to describe him was *fahl*, which carries meanings denoting potency, or as the dictionary puts it: "male (of large animals), stallion; outstanding personality, luminary, star, master."

Twenty-four hours after his capture, a delegation of four members of the Iraqi Governing Council spent half an hour with him. Only Shakespeare could do justice to this confrontation. To a question about the mass graves of his victims, he replied, "Ask these people's families, they were thieves and traitors." One victim was the distinguished Shia ayatollah Sadeq al-Sadr, murdered in 1999 for his opposition to Saddam, and whose name in Arabic sounds like the word for chest. Another of the delegation's questions concerned the ayatollah's fate. "You're asking me about the chest, why not ask me about the legs, too?" Saddam's retort is all of a piece with the scenes of profoundly sinister comedy in *Macbeth*. One member of the delegation was Ahmad Chalabi, and afterward he applied the telling word "narcissist" to Saddam, and summed up the crux of the matter: "To the Americans he was completely deferential. He didn't refer to them in disrespectful terms. He was a very evil man drained of his honor."

Arab newspapers and television channels echo this pithy observation. Opinion then divides on what follows from it. Some are unable to relinquish the fantasy of absolute power and its supporting values. "A New Indignity for the Arabs" is the heading that Abdelbari Atwan, an extreme nationalist, gives to his editorial in *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (which translates as *Arab Jerusalem*, although published in London). "It would have been far better if he had fought to the end and died a martyr," Atwan states, to conclude, "Anything would have been more honorable than ignominious surrender." In their current enthusiasm for suicide bombers, men on the Palestinian street seem to agree that Saddam has betrayed them by surrendering so docilely. The fact that he subsidized the intifada with a reputed $35 million apparently makes it hard for all such to distinguish between true friends and enemies.

The widespread conclusion among Arabs and Muslims is that Saddam has proved a coward and a fraud. Ambiguity nevertheless remains. Iraqis themselves were evidently unable to overthrow their tyrant; Americans had to do it for them. Of course most Arabs recognize freedom when they see it, and rejoice at the turn of events. But the knowledge that somebody else has had to do what you could not do for yourself is disturbing. The impotence, the helplessness, the sight of American soldiers going about their successful business, also induces fear. Muammar Qaddafi, the Libyan dictator, admitted as much (as well he might) when he declared that, as Operation Free Iraq unfolded, "I felt afraid." In Syria, President Bashar Assad similarly has to decide whether his own people or the United States is the greatest challenge to his absolute power. The Iranian regime is also torn between joy at Saddam's arrest and dismay at the evidence of American might. Uncomfortably, the sense of dishonor springs out of emotional and cultural tangles of this kind.

A trial in Baghdad with Iraqi judges will reveal the reality of Saddam's crimes, and so deflate the fantasies of *fahl* and honor that derive from absolute power while at the same time encouraging it. A trial is unlikely to shift ingrained social values very far, but it can mark the birth of independence, and therefore a proper pride and self-respect. And who can guess where that will stop in the Arab and Muslim Middle East? The replacement of dictatorship with the rule of law in any case needs no further justification. **NR**

■ **AT WAR II**

The Treatment He Deserves

This prisoner should not be left to Jacques, Kofi, et al.

JOHN O'SULLIVAN

NEVER have so many congratulations been offered through such painfully gritted teeth. European leaders, Democratic politicians, and media Big Feet all felt compelled to celebrate the capture of Saddam Hussein. After all, as the guardians of the moral conscience of mankind they are supposed to disapprove of dictatorship, torture, and mass murder even more than most people. But welcoming the downfall of Saddam also meant giving aid and comfort to President Bush; that took all the fun out of it.

Listening to European politicians as they followed up their praise for the skill and bravery of the U.S. soldiers who nabbed Saddam with stern demands for the U.S. to share authority in Iraq with the international community or to hand over Saddam to be tried at The Hague, one was reminded of Muslim clerics condemning September 11. Yes, it was shocking and tragic, of course, but so were racist slurs on American Muslims, and "secret evidence" in terrorism trials, and visa rules that discriminated against Middle Eastern countries, and Western colonialism, and the medieval crusades, and the Spanish Reconquista, and . . . In both sets of instances, the qualifications sounded more important and certainly more heartfelt than the condemnations or congratulations they were qualifying.

Tentative, sad, or angry reactions from Arabs to Saddam's capture were generally ascribed in the media to feelings of humiliation. For the umpteenth time a mighty Arab warrior had been defeated and captured by the "arrogant" Amer-

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icans. Worse, the "new Saladin" had behaved in a shamefully craven way and, rather than dying with a gun in his hand, had submitted weakly to a medical examination and a shave. One sympathizes, naturally. But is there not something wrong or inconsistent about a culture that idolizes an Arab power-holder almost because of his ruthless brutality and then complains when a greater (if less brutal) power defeats and humiliates him?

If Arabs and Muslims are to break out of the vicious circle of humiliation-aggression-defeat-humiliation, then they have to settle for modest improvements in their everyday lives rather than seeking historic victories over imagined enemies by proxy. Their present policy of wagging their collective face in an enemy's fist is paying declining dividends in both Iraq and the Palestinian Authority. If humiliation is to be a useful diagnosis of their problems rather than just another excuse, they should be reforming their culture and political traditions to make them more cooperative, liberal, and practical and less clannish, oppressive, and dreamy.

Arabs and Muslims, however, are not the only peoples suffering from a psychological flaw that manifested itself in their response to Saddam's capture. Both "Europe" (a.k.a. France, Germany, the EU, and Russia) and the "international community" (a.k.a. France, Germany, the EU, Russia, and Kofi Annan) responded with stratagems designed to turn this U.S. gain to America's disadvantage. In ascending order of importance these were: 1) that Saddam should not be subject to the death penalty; 2) that Saddam should be tried not by the U.S. or in Iraq but by an international court, preferably at The Hague; and 3) that the U.S. should take the opportunity of Saddam's capture to broaden and "internationalize" the government of Iraq.

There are very few merits attaching to these proposals. Consider the first: that Saddam be spared any possibility of execution. In the first place, this proposal is morally compromised because its exponents include representatives of at least one country, France, that was an ally of Saddam right up to the invasion of Iraq. It is therefore interceding not for justice but for a client. Even if that were not so, it would still be objectionable because its main political purpose is neither to express compassion for Saddam nor to mount a principled argument against capital punishment but to embarrass the United States. It is a staple of anti-American polemics in Europe that American (and especially Texan) employment of the death penalty is barbaric and stands in shameful contrast to the rejection of capital punishment that is at the heart of civilized "European values." Intervening on Saddam's behalf is intended to remind everyone of this supposed contrast. In fact, large majorities of European voters support capital punishment in virtually every European country. What ensures that the death penalty is "outlawed" is not common values but elite contempt for the democratic rights of European peoples—a contempt that is displayed not only on capital punishment but also on currency reform, European integration, and much else.

The present policy of Arabs and Muslims of wagging their collective face in an enemy's fist is paying declining dividends.

The elites themselves are opposed to the death penalty because, among other reasons, they have largely forgotten what political evil is *like*. Or, to be more precise, they have blinded themselves to the reality of political evil, especially that on the left or "progressive" side of politics, because they did not wish to acknowledge crimes that they would then need to protest and punish. Their recent forefathers were more honest. At the end of the Second World War some countries restored the death penalty that they had abolished back in the late 1800s. They felt they needed such a condign punishment to mark their abhorrence of the crimes committed by Nazis and their collaborators. Saddam's crimes surely fall into the same category of horror requiring the same level of punishment and rejection. If that simple, unsophisticated truth is not obvious to the Quai d'Orsay, it surely is to the people of Iraq.

For exactly that reason (and others) Saddam should be tried by Iraqis in Iraq. They are in a better position to evaluate both his crimes and the punishment he deserves. Again, the demand by the "international community" that he be sent to The Hague or some other world tribunal is open to several serious objections. It is, of course, not proposed in order to ensure that Saddam Hussein gets the best and most disinterested justice. Some of the judges on such a court would almost certainly be seconded from countries that were his allies and arms suppliers to the bitter end. (Contrary to what many "activists" seem to believe, Saddam's main arms suppliers were Russia and France, not the U.S. and Britain—both of whom provided not only very modest supplies but also less and less as time went on and Saddam's true character revealed itself.) Iraqi judges and prosecutors would have the strongest incentive to discover the truth about who helped Saddam. Nor does the "Nuremberg precedent" support an international tribunal. Again contrary to what is generally believed, Nuremberg was conducted by the legitimate German government of the day—namely the Four Victorious Powers—and later trials were conducted by the new federal German government. Precedent would therefore suggest that the Coalition should prosecute Saddam if the trial were held today but hand over that task to the new Iraqi government if one is in office by next July.

Of course, the proposal for an international trial is intended not to obtain justice for Saddam but to remind people that the U.S. still opposes the proposed International Criminal Court—and to hint that, whatever Saddam's crimes may

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deserve, the U.S. is not the best guardian of human rights in this or any other case. Those making the proposal merely reveal their bad faith, however, since the rules of the ICC (to whose authority and example they appeal) actually allow war criminals to be prosecuted in national courts unless there is good reason to suspect that such trials will be fraudulent. How anyone can suspect an Iraqi government that does not yet exist of fraud (or any other crime) is a mystery.

The third proposal makes explicit what is merely implicit in the first two proposals: U.S. authority and power should be reduced in Iraq. It should be replaced to some extent by grants of power to Iraqi national bodies. But if these seem likely to reflect excessively American interests and priorities—as previous Iraqi and Gulf regimes took orders from British imperial "residents"—then the international community should replace the U.S. as the supervising imperial power.

It should be obvious that there is very little prospect of these three aims' being realized. Iraqis will ensure that even if the U.S. were to weaken—in the interest of appeasing France, Russia, the U.N., Kofi Annan, etc.—no Iraqi politician or clerical leader with any ambition will agree to let Saddam be sent off to The Hague facing the prospect of a comfortable apartment in some Belgian or Swedish prison with conjugal visits and free weekend passes. The international agencies themselves, having departed Iraq after the first wave of guerrilla attacks, are unlikely to return until the U.S. Army has restored order. And since maintaining order will continue to depend on the U.S. presence, real influence will rest on the most senior American official in Baghdad, and not on Kofi Annan's representative, for the indefinite future.

Being neither unworldly nor naïve, European diplomats and U.N. international lawyers know this very well. It is a measure of their passions and resentments (their humiliation, one might also say) that they cannot hold off from making demands they know to be unachievable on several levels. What they resent, of course, is that such independent power should be exercised by a nation-state rather than being subject to the rules and procedures of international institutions and multilateral cooperation (administered, it is hardly necessary to add, by themselves). That the U.S. is the nation-state in question only makes matters worse since the U.S. is the leading representative of that "Anglo-Saxon" liberalism that has been the bane of continental orders rooted in centralized authority since the modern age began. And they therefore seek to constrain and limit the U.S. and its allies in the name of a future world order built in their image.

It is a consolation that in the U.S. itself the Democrats, the media, the cultural authorities, and the Left largely agree with them. In the light of the likely electoral consequences of Saddam's capture, however, that looks like very cold comfort indeed. **NR**

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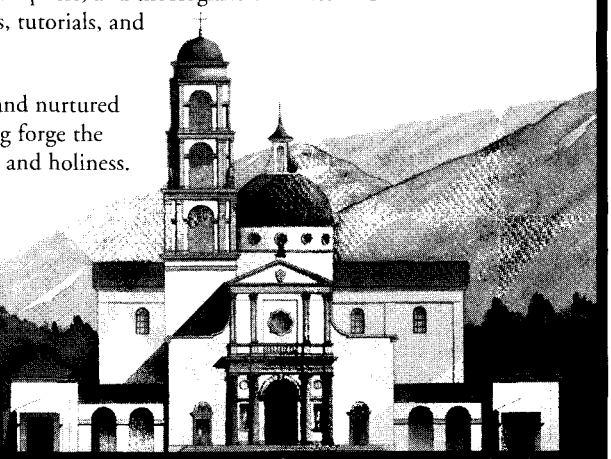

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■ CAMPAIGN 2004

The Bust

John Kerry was to have a stellar candidacy—oops

RICHARD LOWRY

Manchester, N.H.

JOHN KERRY is unveiling his early-childhood agenda at a day-care center. During the primary season, no child-care center either here in New Hampshire or in Iowa is safe from Democratic presidential candidates showing up to talk about how they will protect children. And Kerry is going to protect them but good. His agenda includes better pediatric food labeling, a Department of Health and Human Services investigation of "allergen residue contamination," more laws mandating the use of automobile booster seats, and measures to counteract the distressing fact that "nearly half of all the foods advertised during children's programming are cakes and candies."

Other than in the press release handed out to reporters, however, Kerry's proposals don't come up. Instead, his campaign has enlisted a handful of parents to sit around a table with Kerry and provide him the opportunity for a concerted bout of listening, to be observed by journalists. Kerry nods often and makes sympathetic sounds in the course of furrowing his brows and asking very concerned questions. He routinely says, "No, I understand." Occasionally he'll make an attempt at levity, unfolding one of his long arms to touch someone's shoulder in a gesture of good humor as he looks up and smiles for the cameras. After a good 20 minutes of this, Kerry addresses the reporters to make sure they've gotten the point of the exercise: "Uh, this is about people . . . "

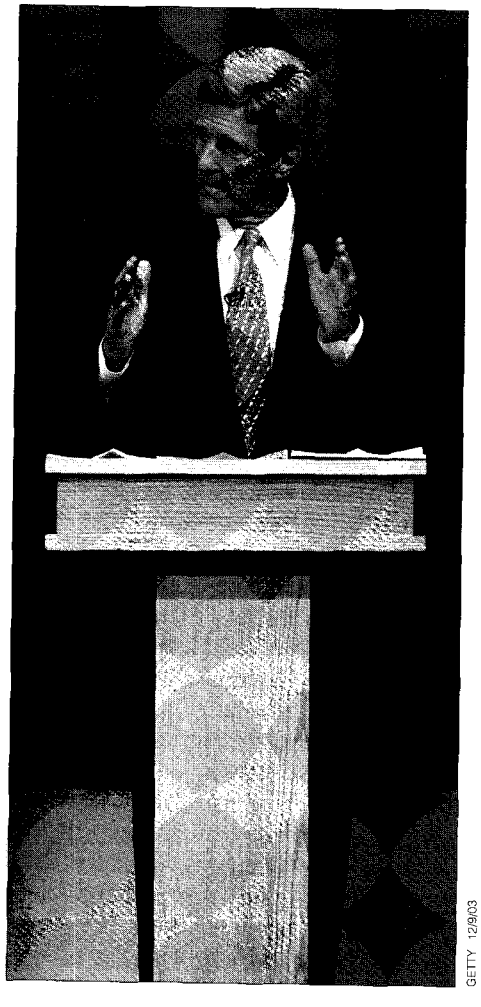
John Kerry is running perhaps the most labored presidential campaign in history. With a heroic war record, a long career in the Senate, a host of standard-issue Democratic positions on the issues, and a distinguished personal bearing, he has everything a political consultant would want in a presidential candidate. Except for the fact that he just doesn't connect. The emotionally hot candidate, Howard Dean, to whom supporters feel an intense, nearly spiritual connection, is stomping the cool, distant John Kerry. Since Dean is running almost even with Dick Gephardt in Iowa, it is mostly his success against Kerry in New Hampshire that is driving the image of him as a runaway, unstoppable force. After Dean's rise, Kerry's flop is the biggest story of the Democratic race.

The flop, just like Kerry's superficial attractiveness as a candidate, has much to do with his résumé. It is not that his résumé has any flaws, but that it is the main rationale for his candidacy. Presidential candidates who have long assumed that they would be their party's nominee—think Bob Dole—tend to run on their "experience." Initially the presumed front-runner in the Democratic race, Kerry followed the pattern, talking obsessively about his résumé and long service to country. Even now, trailing Dean in New Hampshire by more than 20 points, Kerry touts his experience as the first selling point for his candidacy in stump speeches.

He is a slow learner. Experience is important, but no substitute for ideas, passion, and imagination. Worse, Kerry has talked his experience into the ground. His service in Vietnam should be one of his foremost assets, but he has almost neutralized it by talking about it so relentlessly. At times, you could be forgiven for thinking he is the senator from the Mekong Delta. McCain in 2000 made more deft use of his Vietnam experience. When he mentioned it on the stump, he tended to be self-deprecating, joking that it took no talent to get shot down. Otherwise, he didn't talk about his heroism as a POW, because it went without saying. And his war record dovetailed perfectly with his campaign's themes of duty and patriotic service.

Kerry's war record, so far, has dovetailed only with his résumé obsession. The biggest item on his résumé, of course, is his 20 years in the Senate. Commentators trying to make sense of his miserable showing have argued that service in the Senate makes a politician lose his common touch. Maybe. At the beginning of a foreign-policy speech in New York City at the uber-establishment Council on Foreign Relations, Kerry stands at the podium and banters with his introducer. Kerry briefly sounds like a normal human being. Then when he turns to his prepared text, he abruptly shifts to Senate Voice, a deep, I'm-a-great-leader, Orrin Hatch/Joe Biden/Ted Kennedy tone of voice that is so self-consciously serious, it almost hurts.

But maybe Kerry never had a common touch to lose. One underappreciated asset of the Dean campaign is that it is such rip-roaring fun for its supporters. Kerry never seems to be enjoying anything. He is an extremely finicky candidate, always concerned with protecting his own sense of dignity. No one will ever catch him in a Michael



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Kerry debates at the University of New Hampshire.

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Dukakis tank-helmet moment. Nor will they catch him seeming genuinely free and easy.

After the Democratic debates, the candidates go to the "spin room," where scrums of reporters and cameramen surround them, jostling for position to get shards of post-debate comments. Kerry usually makes a point of not going. Surprisingly, he has decided to go to the spin room after a debate at the University of New Hampshire. But it turns out that Kerry has just come to do two stand-up interviews with television networks. So reporters find themselves standing behind him in a semi-circle, straining to hear what he's saying. His back is to the little crowd, who can only stare up at the mute back of his head, his silvery hair brilliantly illuminated by the klieg lights. It's a perfect metaphor for Kerry's storied aloofness.

The next day, Kerry boards his campaign bus, dubbed, heavy-handedly, "The Real Deal Express." An aide urges him to sit in the back to be "among people." Kerry objects, but eventually relents and sits in the last seat on the bus, sandwiched between supporters wearing red "Real Deal" T-shirts. Soon the aide returns to get him to address the bus. She hands him a bullhorn. He doesn't want to take it and instead asks if there isn't a microphone at the front of the bus. There isn't. Kerry hems and haws, and finally takes the bullhorn for what must be one of the most reluctant pep talks ever delivered.

Kerry is in a poor position to criticize other candidates' Iraq flip-flops.

For all of Kerry's struggles, Dean is not yet a lock. The former Vermont governor's chief vulnerability is that he is something of a phony—his left-wing populism a conscious effort to exploit an unfilled niche in the Democratic field. Shrewd Kerry supporters are on to this. A local Democratic county chairman tells me, "I had Howard Dean in my living room a year and a half ago. He's a different person now. Then he said he would get elected because 'I'm a moderate and I won't frighten them by being a liberal.' Now he's saying anything he needs to appeal to those left-wing people."

Kerry himself picks at this theme while taking questions at his day-care event. Kerry says that "the great missing story" of the campaign so far "is the truth about Howard Dean's judgment" on the Iraq war. He recounts that Dean supported a war resolution just like all the other major Democrats and that Dean was talking about Saddam Hussein's having weapons of mass destruction as late as February. "Howard Dean," Kerry says, "exercised the exact same judgment as the rest of us exercised." But Kerry is in a poor position to criticize other candidates' Iraq flip-flops, since he himself has lurched from voting for the war resolution to voting against the $87 billion

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to reconstruct Iraq and fund our troops. Kerry also seems to lack a certain killer instinct.

When Kerry briefly sits at the back of his bus, near a few reporters, I ask him if there are any other issues where there are two Howard Deans. He stares at me blankly for a moment. I think maybe my question is too opaque. I elaborate. Are there any other issues where Dean talks one way when his record suggests something else? Kerry still stares blankly. Finally, after an agonizing silence, Kerry lets loose with a "Yes." I venture a follow-up: "Like what?" He says, "Well, I'll, this is not, I'll, at the appropriate time . . . " He sounds like a senatorial version of the marble-mouthed *King of the Hill* character Boomhauer. Then, after a pause, he adds, "You guys know it, you just want me to say it."

Well, yeah. He's the candidate in the fight of his life, getting trounced by an upstart running under partly false pretenses. Shouldn't that rouse him, provoke some unmodulated, unhesitant passion?

For now, it seems Kerry has another six weeks or so to go through his paces before his candidacy sinks forevermore. Before the University of New Hampshire debate, reporters wait with a Kerry aide for the arrival of a procession of supporters, who will do a brief march with Kerry before the debate begins. At one point, the aide leaves to see if a clump of people are Kerry supporters. He comes back to report, no, it's only people standing at a bus stop. Oh.

Eventually, the Kerry rally shows up and it's actually quite large. The New Hampshire firefighters have endorsed Kerry and are always good for providing manpower and bagpipers. Once it gets going, the procession stretches as far as you can see in the freezing night. Kerry walks at its head, lit up by TV lights, taking huge strides. He cuts an impressive figure. Right behind him is aide Bob Shrum, a large, unglamorous man who looks like the battle-hardened political consultant he is. He carries a briefcase that seems about two feet wide. Even now, he is calculating Kerry's next move. Whatever that calculation is, the chances are that it will be painfully obvious. **NR**

■ **POLITICS**

Ready for '08?

It's never too early for conservatives to fret

RAMESH PONNURU

I AM about to commit a no-no. I am about to make many of NR's readers groan. I am about to discuss the presidential race—of 2008. I know: It's premature. A lot can change in the next five years. So conservatives should get Bush re-elected before we even begin to think about 2008. Right? Wrong. People, including conservatives, have been spending a lot of time talking about the 2008 race. It's just that they're talking about the Democratic race: the presumed contest between Al Gore and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Gore's endorsement of Howard Dean was widely regarded as a key development in that race. Rest assured that the Republicans who hope to run in 2008 are making strategic moves of their own. If they can think about their options in 2008, why can't the rest of us? Especially since the options for conservatives are narrower than most people think.

The first rule in deciding whom to back should be: Eliminate all the senators. Bill Frist, the Senate majority leader, is said to be likely to run for president after leaving the Senate in 2006. Chuck Hagel, a Republican senator from Nebraska, apparently looks in the mirror and sees a president, too. Various conservatives have hoped for runs by Sen. Rick Santorum, Sam Brownback, or George Allen.

The most far-fetched of these candidacies is that of Senator Hagel. It is hard to see whom he expects to support him. His support for the Europeanist position on Iraq—we have to get French permission before acting—has almost no constituency within the Republican party. There are still a few liberal Republicans out there, but whoever Hagel's foreign policy might attract would be put off by his other positions; he voted against the Medicare bill, for example, because it was too expensive and too light on reform.

But leave the senators' individual merits aside. The fatal flaw of all these potential candidates is that they are senators. Only one senator, or politician whose last job was in the Senate, has been elected president since 1920 (JFK). That's not because senators have failed to run; plenty have. It may be because voters don't think that senators have the skills necessary to be executives rather than legislators. Senators can't brag about how well they have run their states. The occasional general or even more occasional vice president can win public support, but it is governors who do best. A current or former governor has won every presidential race since 1960 in which one has run, with one exception (Michael Dukakis). Every time an incumbent president has lost since 1888, it has been to a current or former governor.

Let's assume, for the purposes of this article, that President Bush wins reelection next year. On previous form, his vice president would win the Republican nomination in 2008—just as the vice presidents who served for eight years under Eisenhower, Reagan, and Clinton won their parties' nominations. He would then go on to lose the general election. John Adams, Martin van Buren, and the first George Bush are the only vice presidents to succeed their presidents. But Dick Cheney creates a special case. Nobody expects him to run in 2008.

President Bush could perhaps spare his party a primary fight by running with a different running mate next year. It depends, however, on who the new running mate would be. A Colin Powell or a Tom Ridge would face a serious primary challenge from the right. The same might be true of Condoleezza Rice. A respected conservative with a moderate manner—someone like Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona—would have no such hurdles before him. But given the lack of success of vice presidents running for the highest office, maybe it's for the best that the president is likely to leave the heir-apparent position unfilled.

That leaves (as far as we know at the moment) the governors. But which one? If you had asked the question to Republican insiders in Washington a year ago, a

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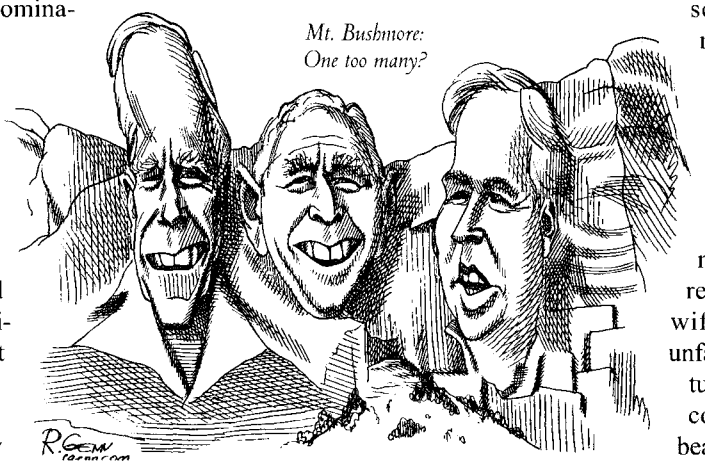
surprising number would have answered: Jeb Bush of Florida. He is the governor of a large swing state, he has a solid record of conservative accomplishment, and his close ties to the national party establishment require no elaboration. Many conservatives spent the run-up to the 2000 campaign wishing that he had won his first campaign for governor, in 1994. They assumed that, if he had done so, he, and not his brother, would have been the frontrunner for the nomination in 2000.

But the disadvantages of his last name, perhaps surprisingly, now outweigh the advantages. If his last name were Stanton, he would be, almost, the obvious candidate for Republicans. But is the American public really prepared for two back-to-back Bush presidencies? For the third President Bush in 16 years? That thought, as it has sunk in over the last year, has given those Beltway insiders a new sense of sobriety about a Jeb Bush candidacy.

The dynastic problem would be mitigated if Bush were running against Senator Clinton. Mitigated, but not eliminated. She would be the second President Clinton in eight years: not the third, and not immediately following another one. There's also no guarantee that she will be the Democratic nominee in 2008. (Hillary as a nominee might also make it safer for the Republicans to nominate a senator.) If Jeb Bush chooses to run, he may very well win the nomination. But nominating him could prove to be a reckless act for the Republican party.

Many conservatives have looked at Colorado's governor, Bill Owens, as a potential presidential candidate. Like Jeb Bush, he has been successful both in getting conservative legislation (including school choice) enacted and in maintaining his own popularity. Also like Bush, Owens is a Catholic; the conventional wisdom is that a Catholic nominee would, all else equal, help the party win votes. Governor Owens would seem to have a good shot at the nomination—were it not for his recent trial separation from his wife of three decades. Fairly or unfairly, the governor's marital status could keep him from being a conservative Catholic standard-bearer in '08.



Mt. Bushmore: One too many?

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There are 26 other Republican governors. Many of them, including such unlikely nomination winners as George Pataki of New York and Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, are said to have presidential ambitions. Two new conservative governors, Craig Benson of New Hampshire and Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, are beginning to attract a modest amount of national interest. In the past, it has been thought that a candidate needed to be "seasoned" by years of high office, in which case such new governors as Benson and Pawlenty would not be eligible. When he ran, President Bush was widely criticized as lacking seasoning himself—he had been elected governor only six years before being elected president. Did his election show that "seasoning" is no longer necessary?

Grover Norquist, the conservative activist, argues that the standards for seasoning have changed now that Republicans have control of both the governorships and the legislatures of twelve states. With unified party control, he argues, a Republican governor can demonstrate his style of governance more easily. If that's true, Benson could make the cut. Two of those unified-control states, interestingly, are Jeb Bush's Florida and Bill Owens's Colorado. Another is Rick Perry's Texas. The counter-argument is that the return of foreign policy as a presidential-election issue makes the traditional seasoning requirement more important.

What's most striking about the field, even on this early review, is how thin it is. The Republican presidential primaries have been a key venue for the exercise of conservative pressure in American politics. The next open primary offers a theoretical opportunity to pull the political debate to the right of compassionate conservatism. Perhaps a consensus candidate for conservatives will emerge over the next few years. But for all the talk about a "Republican realignment," and even of a dawning conservative era in American politics, it is frustratingly difficult to come up with an obvious choice now. That is a reflection of the hard rules about presidential politics mentioned above, the no-senators rule in particular. It may also be a reflection of another truth about life, one that conservatives above all should appreciate: The world is not here to make us happy. **NR**

■ **CULTURE WATCH**

December's C-Word

Who would have thought that 'Christmas' would become verboten? (Don't answer that)

JAY NORDLINGER

WHEN you go to Capitol Hill, you'd better not call the Christmas tree the Christmas tree: It's the "Capitol Holiday Tree," and that's official. (Hang on, aren't the Republicans in charge?) The White House is still holding firm, however: The tree over which it presides remains the National Christmas Tree.

I don't know about y'all in the more Neanderthal parts of America, but in the less Neanderthal, "Christmas" is pretty gauche. When you say "Merry Christmas," you might better have belched. On a recent Sunday, I attended a Christmas concert at Lincoln Center (New York)—the soprano Deborah Voigt was singing with the New York Philharmonic. The program said "holiday concert," of course. But a poster outside said "Christmas Concert." Apparently, someone had not quite gotten with the program (so to speak)—hope he wasn't fired!

A lot of us have been irked by "Happy Holidays," in place of "Merry Christmas," for a long time. Many years ago, I was working at a large firm in Washington, and it was "Happy Holidays," "Happy Holidays," "Happy Holidays," until you wanted to scream. One afternoon, just before Christmas, I said to a friend there, "Merry Christmas." I said it in a soft, gentle, but kind of mischievous way. He just grinned at me, understandingly. You would have thought we were engaging in something subversive, which was just plain weird.

Incidentally, Thanksgiving may be in trouble—I mean, the word. A couple of years ago, as I was touching down in my home state, the stewardess (oops, there I go again) said, "And a happy holiday to everyone." She meant Thanksgiving. But the word seemed a little risky, somehow. More and more, I hear, after that long weekend, "Did you have a good holiday?" Et tu, Thanksgiving?

It's astonishing how many people have internalized the "holiday" business. At that Debbie Voigt concert, I was with a friend who said, at intermission, "I just love the holiday." I had to say, "You mean Christmas?" And she said, "Yes! That's what I mean! How did I get out of the habit of saying that?" One does. It's even possible to be proud. When I was in college, a kid came back to the dorm and announced, beaming, "Today, I said the president and his *spouse*"—meaning Ronald and Nancy Reagan—"and I didn't even have to think about it. It came naturally." He was in no danger of saying *wife*.

Every December, I write about holidayitis, and so do loads of others. In fact, there's a vast literature on this subject, if "literature" is not too grand a word for Internet kvetching and other popular expressions of protest. A website called GrinchList.com is fairly typical—it was created "in response to" a "growing censorship" and to "revisionist policies and practices concerning Christmas," evident in stores, schools, offices, and media. Yes, there's fed-uppery in the land. And NATIONAL REVIEW readers are among the feddest up. How do I know? Because on our website recently—NationalReview.com—I invited readers to give examples of holiday/Christmas outrages, or annoyances, and they responded with a thunderous yawp.

As several readers tell it, even ushers in church, reflexively, wish people a "happy holiday." They have to be reminded, "We're in our own church! It's okay to say 'Merry Christmas'!" One man pointed out that the Salvation Army's mission is, in its words, "to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name." Yet while our reader was bell-ringing, he was admonished by a co-worker not to say "Merry Christmas."

And how about those Christmas trees? Everywhere, they're called "holiday trees," but in some places they're called

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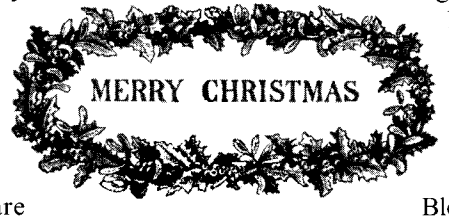
"unity trees," "culture trees," or even "seasonal conifers." A high-school activities director wrote to me, "Every year we have a program once known as The Giving Tree." (This has to do with helping needy families.) "But a tree is apparently a potent religious symbol, capable of inducing alienation, or even conversion." So The Giving Tree became The Giving Snowman—which became The Giving Snowperson. No, really.

In the workplace, "Christmas" is a faux pas, at best. One company lists its holidays thus: "New Year's Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day [yes], and December 25th." December 25th. These people could not bring themselves to utter the C-word. Christmas parties are out, and in are, of course, holiday parties, seasonal gatherings, and end-of-year celebrations. A man writes, "My law firm does a 'Christmas in April' charity event. But it's 'holiday' at Christmas! I'd like them to do a 'Christmas in April' in December for a change." One company decided to avoid naming holidays altogether: Now they just have "scheduled down days."



Schools? Gimme a break. Christmas may not be mentioned in the properly modern American school. A Christmas party is apt to be a "snowflake social." And the Christmas concert has gone the way of the McGuffey Reader, or slate: These are winter concerts, with nothing too Jesusy, please, or maybe "nights of seasonal entertainment" (a new one on me).

Well, surely you're left with a Secret Santa, aren't you? Nice, secular Santa? No way. Mr. Claus is entirely too Christmas-specific. At a Harvard dorm, they were going to have a Secret Santa, but orthodoxy asserted itself, and the name was changed to Secret Winter Snow Friend. My correspondent says, "I made a plea on behalf of all anagram lovers that we compromise and use the name 'Secret Satan.'" Elsewhere, Secret Santas have become Winter Wizards.

For years, the City of Pittsburgh had "Sparkle Season," complete with a mascot, Sparkle, who, it was widely observed, looked rather like a flamboyant Klansman. Now they have, simply, "Downtown Pittsburgh: A Holiday Tradition with a New Twist." (Sparkle was twist enough for me.) In San Diego, "Christmas on the Prado" has become "December Nights." Other localities hold a "Frost Time Festival." The euphemisms are almost invariably gag-making.

Business is playing ball, too—oh, is it. Roughly a million readers wrote me to protest a TV ad from a pet-product company. A husband is teasing his wife about all the presents she's bought for their dog. "But it's his first holiday!" she pleads. Really? Wasn't he around for Veterans Day? Starbucks sells both "Christmas Blend" and "Holiday Blend," depending. Depending on what, I'm not quite sure. And in card sections of supermarkets, you may see "Birthday," "Graduation," "Hanukkah," etc., and then—once more—"December 25th." The naming of all other holidays seems kosher. Even Easter.

Among our readers, a great many Jews said, essentially, "If you're saying 'holiday' on my account, please stop! It grates!" In my experience, the more religious, or even culturally serious, a person is, the more he's apt to dislike "Happy Holidays." The blandly generic has no taste. And I salute the reader who wrote, "Have you ever attended someone else's party—someone's birthday, anniversary, graduation? It wasn't your event, but didn't you share the joy? That's how I feel. I'm not Christian, but I look forward to Christmas every year. Especially the music."

Ah, the music, and what's happened to it: That's a whole 'nother volume of complaint.

Many traditionalists seize on the fact that "holidays" derives from "holy days," so, really, the joke's on those who think that they're skirting something with "holidays." True: and "decimate" used to mean one of every ten, blah, blah, blah. There is no great etymological comfort.

But if it's comfort you want, you may look to the White House, and its current occupant. A peppy lady in Connecticut says, "Before the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, the TV commentators were going on and on about a 'festival of lights' and the 'holiday tree' and all that. And then the president comes on, and he says 'Christmas' about a jillion times, and even worse stuff, like 'star in the East' and 'God's purpose.' It was thrilling!"

Forgive me for ending on a political note—even in a political magazine—but I must ask: Do you have the feeling that George W. Bush is the last un-PC—even anti-PC—president we'll ever have? He calls terrorists terrorists, when he's not calling them evildoers. He says "Merry Christmas" with abandon (I happen to know). Put it this way: If, sometime before 2009, the National Christmas Tree has switched to National Holiday Tree, Bush did not win the 2004 election. **NR**

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■ COVER STORY

George W. Bush *in the* DEMOCRATIC MIND

They've dreamed up some whoppers

BYRON YORK

IMAGINE, if you can, a world in which your only sources of information were the speeches, debates, and press releases of the Democratic candidates for president. In such a world, you would surely believe that a man named George W. Bush had recklessly cut your taxes and shackled your children with deficits while giving sweetheart deals to Halliburton and trampling your civil liberties. This man Bush, you would learn, had also condemned American soldiers to poverty, denied veterans health care, provoked a dangerous nuclear standoff with North Korea, and, on top of it all, ignored a tip from the Saudis that could have prevented the September 11 terrorist attacks. Based on everything you heard, you would be forced to conclude that George W. Bush is a very, very bad man.

That, in only slightly simplified form, is the picture of the president that emerges from the Democratic candidates' words. Some of the allegations are easily refuted, either by common sense or by information at everyone's fingertips. For example, the candidates often charge that the president, who is working with 60 other nations in the effort to rebuild Iraq, is acting "unilaterally." Or that his tax cuts, which affect everyone who pays income tax or receives dividends or pays capital gains, have not touched the middle class. Or that the economy, which is currently growing at the fastest rate in nearly two decades, is the worst since the Great Depression.

But other charges are more complicated and can't be answered in a single sentence. What is really involved in those "sweetheart deals" for Halliburton? Did the president's tax cuts really create the deficit? Has the Patriot Act sent federal agents scouring our library records?

When the primary season arrives in January, the criticisms of the administration will grow much, much louder. So now, while there is still a moment before the storm, here is a look at some of the facts behind the most sensational Democratic charges.

HALLIBURTON

The allegation: that the Bush administration entered into no-bid "sweetheart deals" with the giant defense contractor Halliburton, formerly run by Vice President Dick Cheney. "The U.S. must hand over to the U.N. the contracting process in Iraq," said candidate Dennis Kucinich in December. "No more Halliburton sweetheart deals, no more war profiteering." Although not a serious contender, Kucinich has had great influence on the Democratic pack on the issue of Halliburton. He was the only candidate to bring it up in the first full-field debate, held in early September in Albuquerque, and ever since, the other, higher-profile candidates have followed suit. At a later debate, John Edwards said it would "be irresponsible not to do something to stop this president from giving billions of dollars in American taxpayer money to companies like Halliburton in unbid contracts." Still later, Howard Dean, referring to a controversy over possible Halliburton overcharges for fuel in Iraq, said, "This president is preventing entire nations from bidding on contracts in Iraq so that his campaign contributors can continue to overcharge the American taxpayers."

The answer: Halliburton's work in Iraq began under a giant defense contract known as the LOGCAP, which stands for Logistics Civil Augmentation Program. In the early 1990s, defense planners wanted to be able to do quick, short-notice jobs without having to go through a long competitive-bidding process. They came up with LOGCAP, which is, in effect, a multi-year supercontract in which the Army makes a deal with a single contractor to perform a wide range of unspecified services during future emergencies. The LOGCAP itself is competitively bid,

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meaning that the work done under it can also be considered competitively bid.

In the last LOGCAP competition, in 2001, Halliburton won the contract, and the initial work in Iraq was done, contrary to Democratic assertions, under that competitively bid deal. Later contracts, signed during the war, were indeed awarded to Halliburton without competition, but those arrangements appear to be similar to deals that Halliburton—supposedly the sweetheart of the Bush White House—won under the Clinton administration. In the 1990s, for example, when Halliburton was doing work in the Balkans for the Defense Department, the LOGCAP contract was awarded to another company, yet Clinton officials chose to stay with Halliburton to continue the Balkans job. Later, when the Clinton Pentagon held a bidding competition for the Balkans, Halliburton won the contract again.

As for the investigation of possible overcharges for fuel in Iraq, which concerns Halliburton's supplying fuel from Kuwait when it could have been obtained more cheaply from Turkey, Halliburton says, "The Army Corps of Engineers directed Halliburton to buy and deliver fuel from Kuwait. The company sought and received bids from four suppliers. Only one met the Corps' specifications and that is the one we, and the Corps, chose." From that, it appears that what Democrats characterize as Halliburton's "war profiteering" was in fact a case of the company's following inflexible demands from the Pentagon. The high costs appear to be the result of strict Defense Department specifications, not favoritism for Halliburton—which actually made little profit from the arrangement.

THE PATRIOT ACT

The allegation: that the Bush administration is using the Patriot Act to spy on libraries around the country, looking into citizens' reading habits as part of a misguided war on terrorism. "The last thing we should be doing is turning over our privacy, our liberties, our freedom, our constitutional rights to John Ashcroft," Edwards said at a debate in September. "The notion that they are going to libraries to find out what books people are checking out, going to bookstores to find out what books are being purchased . . . runs contrary to everything we believe in this country." Added Joe Lieberman: "Is the government snooping through people's library records? . . . George W. Bush isn't answering these questions." And Kerry: "When I am president of the United States, there will be no John Ashcroft trampling on the Bill of Rights."

The answer: Although the charges sound wide-ranging, the candidates are in fact referring very specifically to one portion, Section 215, of the Patriot Act, which allows terrorism investigators to view library, business, medical, or other records if they receive a court's permission to do so. What the candidates do not say is that the Patriot Act requires the Justice Department to report to Congress and to the courts precisely how many times it has exercised Section 215. Late last year, and again in May of this year, Justice gave that information to the House and Senate intelligence committees, as well as to the House and Senate judiciary committees. Both reports clearly said that the department had never—not even once—used the Patriot Act to go into any library and examine anyone's records.

"The number of times Section 215 has been used to date is zero," Attorney General John Ashcroft wrote in a September memo to FBI director Robert Mueller. What's more, Edwards, one of the Democrats' most vocal critics of the act, sits on both the Senate intelligence and judiciary committees, meaning he had easy access to the report; in other words, he knew, or should have known, that the Justice Department had not been barging into libraries. In addition, the other senators in the race, as well as House members Gephardt and Kucinich, also had access to the information.

THE DEFICIT

The allegation: that George W. Bush's reckless tax cuts have saddled future generations with deficits. "This administration has shackled our children and grandchildren with the largest deficit in the history of our nation through reckless tax cuts," said Howard Dean in September. Added Wesley Clark: "Americans believed that they had selected a compassionate conservative. Instead, we had a guy who has deepened the deficits. . . . He's been a radical, not a compassionate conservative." And Lieberman: "I would attempt to repeal the Bush tax cuts on the highest-income Americans. . . . It's sent us into deficit that will cost the middle class and . . . our children and grandchildren."

The answer: The tax cut—meaning money left in private hands instead of being placed in the federal treasury—has indeed added to the deficit. But it is not correct to suggest that the president's tax cuts are responsible for all, or even the greatest part, of the deficit.

In a briefing for reporters in July, Office of Management and Budget director Josh Bolten detailed why the budget had gone from having a projected surplus in 2001 to a projected deficit in 2003. The earlier surplus estimates, Bolten said, "were good-faith estimates that took into account no collapse in the stock market, no recession, no September 11 attacks, no revelation of corporate scandals, no subsequent spending or tax changes, no additional homeland-security spending, and no war on terror." Bolten went on to explain that the largest single factor in the change from surplus to deficit was the decrease in federal tax revenues because of the weaker-than-expected economy. "It's important to understand that without any of the president's tax cuts, the deficit this year would be at least $278 billion," Bolten told reporters. Which meant that the president's tax cuts—all of them—accounted for less than $180 billion of a 2003 deficit then projected to be

The high costs for fuel in Iraq appear to be the result of strict Defense Department specifications, not favoritism for Halliburton.

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$455 billion (the final deficit figure was later reduced to $374 billion, with the portion attributed to the tax cut reduced to $159 billion). In addition, there is good economic reason to believe that the tax cuts are contributing to the current economic growth, which will lead to greater tax revenues and a lower deficit. To contend, as every Democratic candidate has, that the tax cuts are responsible for the deficit is simply incorrect.

THE TAX CUTS

The allegation: that the Bush tax cuts, touted as giving a boost to all taxpayers, in fact increased the burden on middle-class Americans. "There was no such thing as a middle-class tax cut for this president," Dean said in October. "He gave you a little and took back a lot." A few months earlier, Dean had declared flatly, "The real effect of the Bush tax cuts has actually been to raise taxes on most middle-class people and to cut their services."

The answer: There appears to be no question that middle-class taxpayers have seen their federal tax burden fall. The Treasury Department estimates, for example, that under the president's latest tax cut, an average married couple with two children and income of $60,000 will see their taxes fall from $3,750 per year to $2,850—a decline of $900, or 24 percent. If they have an income of $75,000, their taxes will fall from $5,817 to $4,695—a drop of $1,122, or 19 percent. Middle-class families in lower tax brackets received proportionally larger cuts. Now, it is true that other taxpayers within the same income brackets have had smaller cuts, but there is no tax filer who pays federal income tax who has not received a cut. Dean claims, however, that the actual amount of money returned to middle-class families by the tax cut was more than offset by increased state taxes, college tuition, and local fees—increases Dean claims are the result of Bush's policies. Indeed, some state taxes have gone up, but it appears that the Bush tax cut was in fact several times larger than the cumulative tax increases at the local level. In addition, things like college tuition costs were climbing long before George W. Bush took office and can be hardly be blamed on his administration.

VETERANS' BENEFITS

The allegation: that Bush, at the height of the Iraq engagement, cut both the combat pay of active-duty servicemen and the medical benefits of veterans. "I've made it very clear that we need to support our troops, unlike President Bush," said Dean in late October, "who tried to cut their combat pay after they had been over there and he doubled their tour of duty; unlike President Bush, who tried to cut—successfully cut 164,000 veterans off their health-care benefits." Added Lieberman: "The Bush administration's decision to cut the pay of our troops in Iraq is unconscionable." And Kerry: "Walking away from our veterans is wrong and in a Kerry administration it will be a thing of the past."

The answer: The combat-pay allegation apparently stems from a single newspaper article, an August 14 report in the *San Francisco Chronicle* headlined, "Troops in Iraq face pay cut; Pentagon says tough duty bonuses are budget buster." Congressional Democrats and presidential candidates seized on the report, but the administration immediately announced that the *Chronicle* was simply wrong. "We are not going to reduce their compensation," said Pentagon personnel chief David Chu the day the report appeared. Chu explained that when Congress voted to increase the troops' pay, the Defense Department asked that the measure be taken out because it would extend bonus pay to troops who were not in Iraq or Afghanistan. "We have plenty of authority" to keep up combat pay, Chu said. After Chu's announcement, a spokesman for the Association of the U.S. Army, a military advocacy group, told *Congressional Quarterly* that he believed Chu's explanation and that the entire affair was "a tempest in a teapot." In any event, Congress decided to go ahead with the pay increase, and in late November, President Bush signed it into law.

As far as VA medical benefits are concerned, the charge stems from the administration's efforts to deal with soaring costs. After Congress loosened VA eligibility rules in the 1990s, extending coverage to those without service-related medical problems, VA enrollment went from 2.9 million in 1996 to 6.8 million today. Given those costs, the VA decided to impose a means test for the best-off veterans. A few years ago, Congress directed the VA to create priority categories for veterans, with Priority Group 1 being those most in need, and Priority Group 8 being those least in need; veterans in Priority Group 8 are those who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and have higher incomes than those in other groups. Facing a budget crunch, the VA decided to freeze Priority Group 8 benefits and exclude those veterans—about 164,000 of them—from the VA system this year (although it made other health benefits available). But the VA also "grandfathered" any Priority Group 8 veterans who were already in the system. The 164,000 veterans cited by Dean and others were never in the system, had no service-related medical problems, and were not cut off from benefits.

NORTH KOREA

The allegation: that George W. Bush created the current crisis with Pyongyang by being needlessly confrontational. "This president's about to allow North Korea to become a nuclear power because he loathes the president of North Korea and he won't sit down and enter into bilateral negotiations with him," said Dean in October. "Well, I don't think the president of North Korea is such a great guy either, but I think it's time to end a foreign policy based on the petulance of the chief executive of the United States of America." Added Kerry: "They've handled it [North Korea] miserably . . . and it was obvious that when you announce a policy of

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preemption and you invade another country, and you begin to build bunker-busting nuclear weapons, that Kim Jong Il was going to find a way to get the attention of this administration, and he did."

The answer: While it would indeed be outrageous if George W. Bush's "petulance" had forced North Korea to begin the production of nuclear weapons, the best intelligence available suggests that Pyongyang has been working on its nuclear program for many years, in violation of the "Agreed Framework" signed with the Clinton administration in 1994. For example, intelligence sources believe that the North has conducted dozens of tests of high-explosive devices of the kind needed to trigger nuclear weapons. During the period when it was supposedly not pursuing nuclear weapons, Pyongyang also did extensive work on long-range missiles to deliver the weapons—well before the Bush administration came into office.

None of that was particularly secret. Dean and Kerry might want to consult former Clinton administration defense secretary William Perry, who in 1999—by that time he had left the Pentagon and was the administration's special adviser on North Korea—told reporters, "What they're [North Korea] doing is moving forward on their nuclear weapons." Perry termed the situation "very serious" and added, "The long-range missile program itself suggests in parallel the development of a nuclear-weapons program."

SEPTEMBER 11

The allegation: that the Saudis gave George W. Bush advance warning that terrorists planned to strike the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. "The most interesting theory that I have heard so far, which is nothing more than a theory, I can't think—it can't be proved, is that he [Bush] was warned ahead of time by the Saudis," said Howard Dean in an interview with NPR in early December. "Now, who knows what the real situation is." Later, when asked by Fox News why he would suggest that the president knew beforehand that 3,000 Americans would be killed, and still did nothing, Dean said, "Because there are people who believe that. We don't know what happened in 9/11."

The answer: This allegation is the exclusive property of Howard Dean and a few Internet conspiracy theorists. No other candidate has suggested anything like it, in part because there is a nearly universal consensus that such sentiments are not only wrong, but dangerously wrong. Still, just for the record: There is no evidence that President Bush or anyone else in the U.S. government knew of the September 11 attacks ahead of time. Neither the joint House/Senate investigation nor the 9/11 Commission has discovered any evidence indicating advance warning. In addition, the president's stunned demeanor on September 11 suggested a man who, like the rest of the country, was surprised nearly beyond comprehension.

* * *

Of course, you won't hear any of these answers from the Democratic candidates and their surrogates. And detailed information on problems like the deficit and VA benefits is not available in any one place; rather, it has to be searched for in budget documents, General Accounting Office reports, and congressional testimony. But it is there—for anyone troubled by the candidates' allegations and curious enough to look for himself. **NR**

■ **HERITAGE**

It Says Here . . .

Christmas with ten children and two parents

ALOÏSE BUCKLEY HEATH

You know that house where, the night before Christmas, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse? Well, that wasn't our house. That was a house where mamma in her kerchief and papa in his cap could settle their brains for a long winter's nap because they knew good and well that St. Nicholas was about to come down the chimney with a bound and do absolutely everything.

It may come as a surprise to many people, but the fact is, St. Nicholas doesn't do one blessed thing for the Heath family. At our house—and I wouldn't want this mentioned in front of just anybody—Santa Claus is really Ben and me; and the period during which not a creature is stirring, not even a mouse, lasts roughly from 4:10 A.M. to 5:00 A.M. By six o'clock, actually, you couldn't call what goes on in our house "stirring."

You know the family that gathers round the hearth on Christmas Eve while Father re-reads the beloved *A Christmas Carol*? Firelight flickering on absorbed little faces? Baby dropping off to sleep on Mother's shoulder? Well, that's not our family, and I bet you guessed.

ASLOSH WITH TRADITIONS

I hope I'm not giving anyone the impression that Ben and I are not respecters of tradition, because the fact is that we're simply aslosh with traditions. We always sing Christmas carols after dinner; we always hang our stockings on the mantelpiece; we always set out cookies and milk for Santa Claus, but we just don't have the time to listen to Ben read *A Christmas Carol*. We have a substitute tradition: We give Janet and Timothy a half-teaspoon of liquid phenobarbital, Jennifer, Betsey, and Alison a teaspoon, and Buckley, Priscilla, and John two teaspoons each. (We've had to keep the two eldest off the stuff these past two years; they have to stay alert.)

Then we send 16-year-old Jim, who has a voice like a bull calf, into the living room with the big children and make him read Dickens's beloved *A Christmas Carol*; and 14-year-old Pam, who has such a sharp eye and a quick hand that she can whack a small bottom while its owner is still wondering which trespass to commit, takes the peewees into the nursery to hear Clement C. Moore's beloved "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

A Christmas story by the late Aloïse Buckley Heath is an NR tradition.

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Ben and I refill the coffee pot and proceed forthwith to the furnace room, which is where *we* spend Christmas Eve. Not by choice, you understand—if we had a choice, we'd watch *Amahl and the Night Visitors* or take a walk or something—but because the furnace room is the only one in our house in which you can a) store 167 different items, ranging from aeroplane: gasoline-powered to Zig-Zag Puzzle Map; and also b) lock.

Nine out of ten of these items, you understand, have to be organized or set up or assembled, and a good many of them have to be either re-constructed or re-designed from scratch. All of them must be fully understood if Christmas morning is not to shrill with the sad cry of: "What's all that stuff supposed to *be*?" and "The box says Astro-Dyno Jet, but it's just a bunch of iron sticks!" or "I'll never be able to play with that. The directions have too-long words!" All of which leaves Ben and me with the choice of working in the living room after the last child is asleep—and when you have ten children that means never—or spending Christmas Eve in the furnace room.

The furnace room is rather peaceful, actually. By the time we've opened the boxes and laid out the hammer, saw, screwdrivers, wrenches, pliers, files, glue, rubber cement, safety pins, needles and thread, toothpicks for stiffening tabs that won't go into slots, crochet hooks and rubber bands for putting dolls' arms back on, Mercurochrome, Band-Aids, tranquilizers, Benzedrine, phenobarbital, aspirin, and a dictionary, we hardly even notice the furnace, which has a way of breathing like a dinosaur with croup. Jim's voice, bellowing, "Sit DOWN, Buckley," or, "I said QUIET," filters down to us in a soft murmur; and since the nursery is on the third floor and Pam's energy is limited, she clatters down only every now and then to tell us that Alison is blowing into Jay's ear and blaming it on Betsey, or that Alison keeps sticking her feet under Timothy and pinching him with her toes, or that Alison keeps muttering "moon on the *breast* of the new-fallen snow, moon on the *breast* of the new-fallen snow" and making the others laugh and act silly . . . "Well, she *thinks* it's a bad word, Mother, or she wouldn't bother to say it. You know how absolutely vulgar Alison is."

"Send her down to Jim's group," I roar through the screws in my mouth, which isn't much help—or much help to Jim, anyway—but my maternal instinct always seems to wane as my mechanical instinct waxes.

If you could call it an instinct.

If you could call it mechanical.

I do know some of my limitations, though, so I always start with a simple thing, like "ROLLING TENNIS: A new game for home fun," for instance. ROLLING TENNIS has only about six pieces, which is practically boring to a woman who was on Dean's List the entire first semester of her sophomore year at college. The instructions are nice and short, too. *The elastic steel needle*, they begin . . . (There's no elastic steel needle in the box, but the nearest thing to it is a kind of hard, spiky thing that bends, so that must be what) *must be kept in a way that it sits up on the edge of the table.* The trouble is, it won't stay in a way that it sits up on the edge of the table unless I hold it there, and surely the ROLLING TENNIS people couldn't mean that, could they? They don't really mean for me to spend the declining years of my life holding up that spiky thing! Do they realize that I have ten children? That I'm 43 years old? Well, of course they do. There's some perfectly simple thing that I've overlooked.

"Ben, it says here . . . " I begin.

"First things first," mumbles Ben, who is engaged in his annual re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the electric train, which he always can't understand something in the transformer of. I don't tell him that if he'd leave the train *up* all year round he and the transformer wouldn't have to go through this every Christmas Eve. I don't tell him because it's too early. This is what I tell him around 2:00 A.M., and I'm a stickler for tradition. Anyway, it's time to check everybody's teeth (and to tell Alison for the last time that sticking her toothbrush under the faucet doesn't fool *me* for one minute) and to hear everybody's prayers (and to tell Alison for the last time that beating everybody else to the "Amen" is *not* praying) and to kiss everybody goodnight (and to kiss Alison twice and tell her I love her anyway, which is the simple truth). On my way down I hear the baby calling "H-e-ere, Mudda! Here, boy! *Come* on!" and since I train her in obedience—you can never begin too young, I always think—I obey, and we have a little chat and a little rock and a little back rub until she falls asleep again.

By the time I get back to the furnace room Ben has had time to accomplish a great deal, and I feel much better about everything, even ROLLING TENNIS.

So, all right, I will hold the spiky thing in a way that it sits up on the edge of the table. It's not as if the children were going to play rolling tennis eight hours a day! Now: *By a slight pressure of this needle upon the axis of the runner fitted with a rubber tie the latter one begins to move, the other player swiftly catches up, stops it to run, and jerks back with the same movement.*

Only there's no runner. There is a rod with a little rubber tire at each end, but if that's the runner, how would I press its axis? Anyhow, an axis is what things *turn* on, isn't it? I know it is; I won't even look it up; and it's nine o'clock and Ben has started to fiddle with that idiotic transformer again. ROLLING TENNIS will simply have to wait till he finishes. At least I know the rules. *He who has won a point plays last, but in a new game it is the last loser who plays first.*

BETTMANN/CORBIS

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YOUR FRIENDLY CORNER STORE

I pull out Your Friendly Corner Store. This is more my type, and besides it has a diagram which not only illustrates and labels Parts A to X of the Corner Store, but also its accessories. "Telephone," it tells you, under a picture of a telephone. "Cord." "Cash register." "Your Friendly Corner Store sign."

"Check off each step as you complete it," they warn you (and show you how—like this ☒) and "Follow all directions step by step." I never was a leader, anyhow, so I start right in. Step 1. ❑ *From the white side of the board press out all excess fireboard from all slots, notches and edges so that all the parts look like those in the kit drawings. Punch out holes for screws with a sharp pencil point.* ❑ *Place parts in alphabetic order.* My Friendly Corner Store and I are not so friendly as we used to be, by the time I finish Step 1. I feel they have not been quite straight with me. They clearly implied that there was only one ❑ to a step, but, I now note, there are seven ❑s in Step 10, alone.

"Ben, look at this. It says here . . ."

"There's no point in getting mad about it," says Ben, who has made up with the transformer, solved ROLLING TENNIS (they meant "axle," not "axis," if that means anything to you), and is happily assembling some Thermo-Turbo thing without so much as a glance at the directions.

"Who's mad?" I snarl. Setting up the Corner Store involves pushing 78 stupid little slots, and I know from experience that at the slightest sign of irritation on my part the tabs will turn into 78 sulky little bits of tissue paper. I grit my teeth and plod on. By the time I finish Step 12 (49 ❑s later) Ben has put together the bicycle, the tricycle, the tractor, both doll carriages, the doll's house, and the Walker Wagon. He is about to begin the electric hockey game when he discovers the instructions are in French. He hands me the instructions.

I can read French all right, but who knows what a *filet des buts* is, for heaven's sake, or a *casier pour pile sèche*, or a *vis à métal*, except maybe a French electrician. I go upstairs for the Larousse. (*I* know; but I don't think a French dictionary should necessarily be an integral part of Christmas Eve, not even at our house.) When I let myself back into the furnace room Ben looks at me for the first time this evening and blanches.

"Are you going to church like that?"

"Like what?" I answer huffily. And rhetorically.

Ben holds the Dreamy Dressing Table mirror up to my face. "It's 11:30," he says, and I tear up the stairs again.

Midnight Mass clears the crossness out of me. Priscilla goes with us this year, along with John and Pam and Jim; and as I watch them come back from Communion they look so solemn and young and tired and beautiful that my heart almost bursts. My heart almost bursts until I kiss them "Merry Christmas" in the cold starlight outside the church, and they refuse, with cries of revulsion, to kiss each other. Then my heart shrivels right back to normal.

Still, the furnace room *is* an anti-climax.

By 1:30, Ben and I are getting ruthless. When we find that the assembly instructions for John's cuckoo clock take up a 16-page booklet and begin: "Look what we have here!! What fun!! It's all the parts that go to make a real-as-life BLACK FOREST CUCKOO CLOCK!!" we clap the cover right back on the box and agree to pretend we thought he wanted a do-it-yourself cuckoo clock. We give up on the Corner Store after we notice that, besides the 19 Steps on the front of the instruction sheet, there are an additional 33 on the back. Anyhow, Betsey hasn't mentioned that Corner Store in weeks.

By 2:15 the B-52 Turret Gun, the Helicopter-Bomber, the Kookie Kitchen, the weight-lifting set, and the puppet theater are assembled and upstairs; by 3:00 we've finished the musical rocking chair, the robot lady, the Sonar set, the fire engine, the weather station, the Yakkity-Yob, and we've even found out how to make the Kissy dolls kiss. By 3:45 every last item is complete and in the living room; the Christmas list has been recovered from the rubble on the furnace-room floor, and we're ready to distribute. That is, Ben arranges artistic exhibits and I sit on the floor stuffing Christmas stockings and tell him where artistically to arrange them.

By the time I finish Step 12 (49 ❑s later) Ben has put together the bicycle, the tricycle, the tractor, both doll carriages, the doll's house, and the Walker Wagon.

"No, not there, honey: The Winchester rifle is Alison's. Put it on the desk with the Hedda-Get-Bedda doll . . . That Chubby Checker album goes with Pam's stuff, Ben. Right over there—by the lounging pyjamas. The Mass in B Minor is John's—in the corner, sweetie! With the lie detector and the mineralogy set." Or: ". . . Ben, he's not even four years *old*! And anyhow, couldn't we thrash this out some other time? . . . All right, all right, but just for now would you *please* put that Kissy doll under the piano with Timothy's dump truck?"

And finally we're through. We thumbtack a sheet across the entrance to the living room and tiptoe upstairs to hang stockings on children's bedposts. Ben takes those for the children who don't believe in Santa Claus, because if they wake up they'll know it's only Daddy with the stockings; and I take those for the children who do, because if they wake up, they'll know it's only Mother.

At 4:10, in the black dark of the upstairs hall, I tiptoe round a corner into Ben, tiptoeing from the opposite direction. I gasp and clutch him.

"It's only Santa Claus."

"Oh, Ben," I sigh, too tired even to move away from his cheek, which feels like a cactus patch. "What will we ever do when the children are grown up?" **NR**

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HELP!!!!

EARLY CHRISTMAS PRESENT

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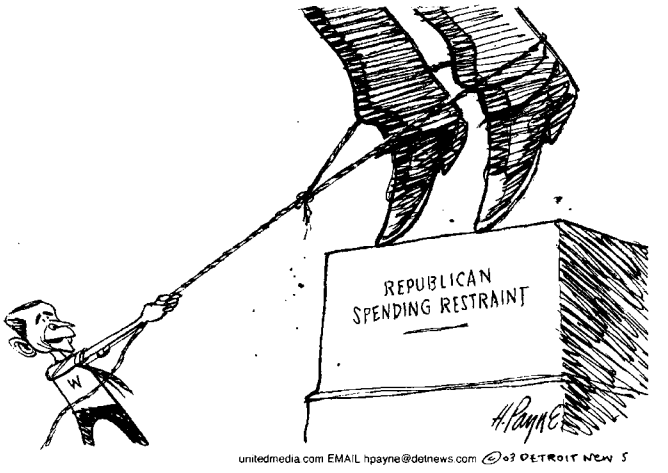
Europe's Founding Moment

Philly, it wasn't; the French
Raised a deplorable stench.
Followed by Germany, which
Kicked the thing into the ditch.
Jacques, who insisted The Six
Blackball those New Europe hicks,
Dreams of a ballroom where France
Leads the cotillion. Fat chance.

—W. H. von Dreele



"Hey, wait—if you say I have a 'will to fail,' then I have been successful!"

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the long view

ROB LONG

Greetings, friends!

Would it be too terrible a strain
To accept a "Merry Christmas" from Saddam Hussein?
Would it freak you out or make you mad
Even if I admit that I've been bad—
Okay, bad may not be exactly the word
For me, if you ask your average Kurd,
But I'm asking you, my American reader,
Now that my hair is cut and I look a bit neater,
If maybe, now that I'm in firing-squad range,
You believe, deep down, that people can change.

You'd be surprised how one's thoughts get stirrin'
When one is sitting in a pool of one's own urine,
With rats and lice in a deep dirty pit
Smelling of fear and a pantload of . . .

But let's keep this clean! And keep it upscale!
After all, there's a happy ending to this tale.
I did some bad stuff, I get it, I'm sorry,
I'm sorry, I'm sorry, can you get me on Maury?
Or Oprah? Larry King? Or even though he's a pill,
I'd listen to an offer from TV's Dr. Phil.

I'd like to tell my side in a more informal style
Than what I'll get at my televised trial.
I'll say I'm sorry and mean it, I'm a better
man—
Which do you think? Leno or Letterman?—
I want everyone in the world to see the new me,
I'll say where I hid some WMD!
These are just options! Nothing's set in concrete!
I'll talk about a shy boy growing up in Tikrit
Who didn't have any friends, or a dad who knew
That an encouraging word or a hug or two
And "I love you" is what a boy wants to hear.
It's called fatherhood, dammit, it doesn't mean you're
queer.
I was different with my boys, Uday and Qusay—
I was very supportive—where are they, by the way?

(A public note to Mr. Seymour Hersh
That on the advice of my lawyers, Messrs. Cochran and
Dersh,
I can't return your calls, but I'm not being elusive,
It's just that Katie Couric bought a two-week exclusive.)

So the past is past—can we move on, do you think,
To when you hear my name you don't automatically link
It to torture and mass graves and gas-attack scares,
But instead to a prime spot on *Hollywood Squares*?
Or if I can be permitted a dreamy conjecture,
I see myself at Harvard, giving a lecture;
They'll pay big bucks, now that they're stressed
To make people forget how they lost Cornel West.

I'll talk of the future—I hope to have one, of course,
But before I wallow in too much remorse,
There are some people to thank, more than a few,
Who stood by me even as the war winds blew—
And even after the soldiers stormed my home.
I thank Sontag, Susan, and Chomsky, Noam,
And I'd be remiss if I didn't go thankin'
George Galloway and Mr. Al Franken.
These were the loyal ones, these women and men—
Wait a sec, I forgot little Sean Penn,
And Susan Sarandon, and though she's easy to mock,
Miss Barbra Streisand. Oh!—and Jacques Chirac!
How could I forget him? And for that matter, Schroeder,
Who sold me that cool thing that looks like a motor
But really is meant to turn used-up uranium
Into something that'd threaten a Super Bowl stadium.
And though the French are famous for cooking and sex,
They're good friends to have when you're making VX.
What am I thinking? I must have rocks in
My head—hey, thanks for the botulinum toxin
To my own Dear Leader, Mr. Kim Jong Il,
Who sent loads of great stuff, each order did fill,
With missiles and rockets and satellite photography
And took payments in cash and explicit pornography.
To the EU, the U.N., the Hollywood scene—
You were my own super-secret super-special
fedayeen.

My thanks to you all! We fought the good fight!
But deep in my hole, in my permanent night,
I learned a little about how the worm turns,
And as fun as it was to give third-degree burns
To anyone—everyone—who stood in my way,
A climate of fear, all night and all day,
And to saunter through my torture-house halls
And watch them attach clamps to my enemies' . . .
Well, you get the idea, the picture, the gist—
I ruled with an iron inflexible fist.
But look at me! I'm no longer so healthy, so stocky,
Give me international justice, just not Iraqi,
'Cause those guys are nuts, you know how they get
When they've got a murderer caught in their net.

They don't get the Christmas thing like you do and I do,
They're all, "We were tortured and beaten and lied to,"
Look in your hearts! Feel the holiday grace!
And please get me out of this freakin' place!

So Christmas wishes to you and yours,
From a guy who's spent some time out of doors,
All blessings and happiness and great good cheer
Should fill your lives throughout next year!

But especially, mostly, to a certain cat
Who's been more than willing to swing the bat
For me in times both fat and lean:
Merry Christmas, Dr. Howard Dean.

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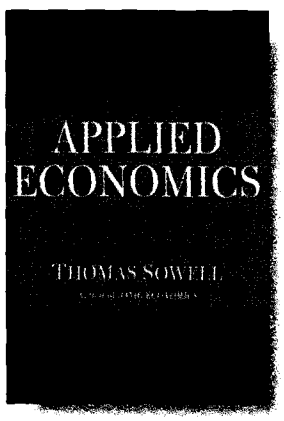
How Economics Works



Applied Economics: Thinking Beyond Stage One, by Thomas Sowell
(Basic, 246 pp., $30)

RICHARD A. EPSTEIN

One time-tested principle of economic theory is diminishing marginal utility, and economics itself is no exception to this general rule. The initial returns to economic study are massive: Mastering a few key principles unlocks a deep understanding of a wide range of phenomena that otherwise lie under a heavy mist of obfuscation. But the modern preference of economists for highly mathematical expositions of obscure problems shows that the discipline that taught us to make all judgments at the margin often violates its own precepts.

Happily, one of the older standbys in the economics discipline still knows how to keep it simple. In *Applied Economics*, the companion volume to his earlier work, *Basic Economics*, Thomas Sowell uses rudimentary economic theory to unmask the cant that surrounds too many policy debates. The subtitle to this new book contains Sowell's basic message: What works in the short term proves to be folly in the long term, once its full consequences are exposed. In rapid succession, Sowell shows how ignoring this one principle leads to misguided tax policies, and harmful state intervention in labor and employment, health care, housing, and insurance.

Sowell is no foolish utopian who thinks that markets will instantly propel us into the best of all possible worlds. In line with earlier laissez-faire thinkers, he understands the virtue of *patience* in the face of poverty and deprivation. The Jewish and Italian immigrants who came to the U.S. a century ago endured dreadful housing to save enough cash to bring their families over from Europe. The reformers who required them to live in better housing may have eased their own consciences, but such reform did not improve the immigrants' overall welfare, because it forced them to surrender the benefits they wanted for the ones they didn't. Wait, don't legislate, counts as a central prescription for sound economic policy.

But many people can't wait. Politicians will always seize the moment to consolidate power, and to them there is little Sowell can say, for they know what they are about. But Sowell rightly takes the ameliorists to task for committing the same cardinal sin multiple times: They judge each major piece of social engineering by its laudable objectives. They look only to stage one, that is, to the short-term effects of their proposal. To perfectionists, single discrete actions have single discrete consequences. Find some major dislocation, then pass some bill to overcome the problem. If local revenues are too low, raise taxes. If housing is too shoddy, then regulate minimum quality. The ills of humankind can be legislated away with the stroke of a pen.

Few people today actually believe this fairy-tale account in its entirety. But lest they (and we) lapse into bad habits, it is refreshing to read a clear, often elegant explanation of how the best-laid plans at stage one backfire once their full consequences are laid bare at stage two. Sowell's opening salvo illustrates the point by exploding the well-known truism that higher taxes will solve the budget shortage of local communities: After all, everyone "knows" that the local businesses have nowhere else to go. True enough in the short run, when taxpayers have to grin and bear it; but not so true in stage two, when the status quo starts to unravel. No community is ever static, and heavily taxed individuals work hard to minimize their burden. They may not rip down their stores on day one, but when it comes to renovation or expansion of existing facilities, they will cut back on their investments in high-tax communities and expand their activities in more hospitable locales. New business, the lifeblood of communities, shies away from investing in high-tax regions. Sooner or later, often sooner, the local tax base shrinks from the combined forces of high exit and low entry, thus *reducing* total revenues.

Here's another example from Sowell: price controls. Tell doctors that they can charge only $X per visit, and they'll comply with the law by shortening the visit. Before the regulation, the visit lasted for 20 minutes, and covered multiple conditions; now, magically, visits get truncated, and each is restricted to a single topic or a single shot. In the old system, when markets determined the mix between price and quality, doctors had no incentive to court patient dissatisfaction by stringing out visits. Now, of course, they do, and the lesson is that both physicians and patients are worse off under regulation than they were before. The patient may pay as much for the longer course of treatment, but receives less effective care. The moral: Regulate one side of an ordinary contract and you make both sides to the deal worse off at stage two.

On these basic issues, Sowell does not miss a beat. Political control of decisions on the creation and allocation of goods and services puts the power in the hands of individuals who do not have to bear the direct consequences of their own poor judgment, while depriving ordinary individuals, who have a great stake in the

Mr. Epstein is a professor at the University of Chicago Law School and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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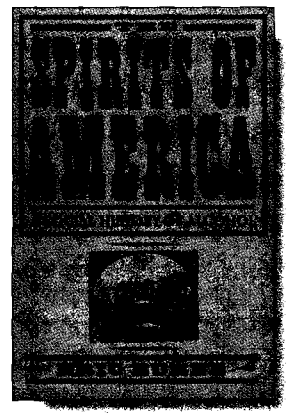
outcome, of the control of their own destiny.

To all this agreement it is necessary to add one major caveat. Sowell chooses his targets well, but he is so consumed with rooting out misguided forms of state regulation that he overlooks those complex situations where simple market solutions falter. The ordinary forces of supply and demand do not furnish obvious first-best solutions for public utilities, telecommunications, transportation, the Internet, and intellectual property. One key problem arises when different firms have to coordinate their efforts for the system as a whole to be effective, which means that voluntary transactions cannot be counted on to create a seamless network out of various competing firms. Finding second-best solutions is a perilous venture, as anyone who has watched the dizzying path of public regulation of railroads in the 19th century and telecommunications in the 20th can testify. Hard trade-offs arise between innovation on one hand and wide dissemination of goods on the other. Sowell himself misfires, for example, on pharmaceuticals; while he rightly understands the dangers of allowing cheap reimportation of drugs from Canada, he claims that pharmaceutical innovation does not take place in countries with weak intellectual-property protections. Not true, at least not for that reason: Research can take place *anywhere* so long as foreigners can obtain patent protection in the U.S. and other advanced countries—which they can.

It is to be hoped that Sowell will next turn his attention to the hard issues of applied economics—from patent and copyrights to antitrust and rate regulation. Sowell is right to preach the superiority of competitive markets to various forms of regulation that backfire with alarming regularity. But a complete picture of the economic landscape requires an understanding of how regulation and taxation should be structured as well. The economics and legal professions have made real strides in understanding these issues; it will take, however, someone with Sowell's gifts for lucidity and common sense to make these insights accessible to the public at large. **NR**

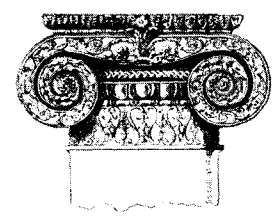
Killjoy Was Here



The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol, by Eric Burns (Temple, 352 pp., $29)

ANDREW STUTTAFORD

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, a wise man and a brave one too (he was speaking to the sober souls gathered at a meeting of a Springfield temperance society), once said that the damage alcohol can do comes not "from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing." Drunkenness, not drink, was the real demon. Sensible words; yet, in their dealings with the bottle, his countrymen still lurch between wretched excess and excessive wretchedness. Moderation remains elusive. After the binging, there's always the hangover: dreary years of finger-wagging, sermonizing, and *really*, really dumb laws. Just ask poor Jenna Bush.



Spirits of America, Eric Burns's entertaining history of the impact of an old pleasure on a new world, is rather like a Washington State cabernet sauvignon, unpretentious and thoroughly enjoyable. Burns, the host of *Fox News Watch*, is not a professional historian. His prose is engaging and relaxed, written in the rhythms of an accomplished raconteur rather than the jargon of the academic. In short, this book is about as dry as a colonial tavern.

To Burns, it's not surprising that the first settlers, as strangers in a strange and not always hospitable land, should have turned to drink: to beer, to whisky, to brandy, to rum, and even to an alarming-sounding series of proto-cocktails. Rattle-skull, anyone? Reading his account, it's easy to conclude that many of these early Americans spent most of the day drunk, proving once again (at least to this Brit) that they cannot have known what they were doing when, after a revolution fomented largely in those same taverns, they broke from the embrace of the mother country.

Needless to say, all this good cheer produced a reaction, and the greater (and most interesting) part of this book is devoted to prohibitionists and their long, far from fine, whine. It's a painfully familiar tale to anyone who has watched the drug war, the excesses of the anti-tobacco movement, or even the gathering fast-food jihad.

The parallels are telling. There's the junk science so shaky that, by comparison, "passive smoking" is as believable as gravity. Dr. Benjamin Rush, "the Hippocrates of [18th-century] Pennsylvania," linked drink to a wide range of health problems including scurvy, stomach rumblings, and, for the truly unlucky, spontaneous combustion. Around a hundred years later—and a century before the nonsense of DARE—the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was distributing an "education" program in schools that included the startling news that alcohol could lead "the coats of the blood vessels to grow thin [making them] liable at any time to cause death by bursting." Boozehounds should also watch out. Children were taught that even a tiny amount of this "colorless liquid poison" would be enough to kill a dog.

Like their successors today, these campaigners understood the uses of propaganda. Even the choice of that soothing word "temperance" (which ought to mean moderation, not abstinence) was, as Burns points out, nothing more than

Mr. Stuttaford is a contributing editor of National Review Online.

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spin before its time. No less disingenuously, the name of the influential Anti-Saloon League camouflaged prohibitionist objectives far broader than an attack on the local den of iniquity, a technique that may ring a bell with those who believe that MADD is now straying beyond its original, praiseworthy, agenda.

Above all, what is striking is how, then as now, the zealots of abstention were unable to resist the temptation of compulsion. Burns is inclined to attribute the best of intentions to the "temperance" campaigners. He's wrong. The fact is that neither persuasion, nor education, nor even psychotic Carry Nation's hatchet was enough to satisfy the urge to control their fellow citizens that played as much a part in the psychology of teetotalitarianism as any genuine desire to improve society. From the Massachusetts law providing that alcohol could not be sold in units of less than fifteen gallons to the grotesque farce of Prohibition, *Spirits of America* is filled with tales of legislation as absurd as it was presumptuous.

Although he never holds back on a good anecdote (the story of Izzy Einstein, Prohibition Agent and master of disguise, is by itself worth the price of this book), when it comes to the Volstead years themselves, Burns gives a useful and, dare I say it, sober, account. Contrary to machine-gun-saturated myth, the mayhem (if not the corruption) was mostly confined to a few centers, and although Prohibition did clog up the justice system, enforcement, mercifully, usually tended to be less than Ness.

Even more surprisingly, while he doesn't come close to endorsing Prohibition, Burns is able to point to data showing that, in certain respects at least, the killjoy carnival was a success: Per capita alcohol consumption fell sharply, as did the incidence of drink-related health problems. But even these achievements may mean less than is thought. Other evidence (not cited by Burns) would suggest that, after an initial collapse, consumption started to rise again as new (illicit) suppliers got themselves organized, with often disastrous consequences for their customers. Winston Churchill, no stranger to the bottle himself, was told that "there is less drinking, but there is worse drinking," a phrase, incidentally, that almost perfectly describes the impact on today's young of the increase in the drinking age to 21. As for the alleged health benefits, the 1920s also saw notable reductions in, for example, deaths from alcoholism and cirrhosis of the liver in Britain, a country that saw no need for prohibition.

What Burns underplays, however, is the fact that this debate should be about more than crudely utilitarian calculations. There's a famous comment (cited by Burns, but, sadly, quite possibly a fake) widely attributed to Lincoln that sums this up nicely. Prohibition, "a species of intemperance in itself . . . makes a crime out of things that are not crimes. [It] strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our Government was founded." **NR**

EPHESUS

According as he hath chosen us . . .

Walking the ruins of Ephesus
In the footsteps of St. Paul,
They gaze upon a sculpted foot
Pointed towards a fleshly stall.

The lately chosen of the Lord,
Prim presbyters of the Paraclete
Perambulate among worn stones
Undeterred by blazing heat.

Epistles scribbled on post cards
Substantiate their bible tour;
Omitting threat of holy war,
Blue believers to the core.

At the mosque they shed their shoes,
Wrap each foot in a plastic sack;
Envision heaven on the dome
Over cursive Arabic.

Step gingerly across plush rugs
Place for foreheads on rough stone;
Meek Crusaders of the lamb
Come to admire and to atone.

As Paul in sandals on these shores
Once preached and pagans proselytized,
Admitting to his church of Christ
The outcaste and uncircumcised.

—RICHARD O'CONNELL

Spirit World

Off the Sand Road: Ghost Stories, Volume One, by Russell Kirk
(Ash-Tree, 206 pp., $45)

What Shadows We Pursue: Ghost Stories, Volume Two, by Russell Kirk
(Ash-Tree, 254 pp., $45)

R. ANDREW NEWMAN

For millions of moviegoers, it seems, *Freddy vs. Jason* represents the summit of the horror genre; those looking for scary narratives of a more intellectually and spiritually stimulating kind would do well to seek out the tales of Russell Kirk. One of the intellectual founding fathers of the postwar conservative movement, Kirk was a versatile man of letters who penned some of the best uncanny tales of all time. Over three decades, his stories appeared in such periodicals as *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *London Mystery Magazine*, and *Queen's Quarterly*. The tales were collected in three volumes, *The Surly Sullen Bell* (1962), *The Princess of All Lands* (1979), and *Watchers at the Strait Gate* (1984); unfortunately, these fell out of print and are hard to find. But now Kirk's stories have returned, thanks to a small press in British Columbia that specializes in classic supernatural fiction.

For Kirk, who died in 1994, ghost stories were not mere exercises in gore or terror. A 20th century infested with gulags and gas chambers provided demonic fright enough. Through the eerie fun of his scary tales, he was trying to reawaken a sense of a greater reality, a world that touches but is not bounded by the physical, in an age smothered by materialism and suffering from the decay of traditional religion. As for ghosts, he thought them very real and claimed

Mr. Newman's work has appeared in *Modern Age* and *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*.

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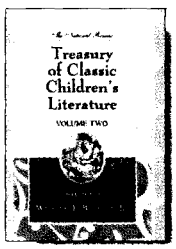
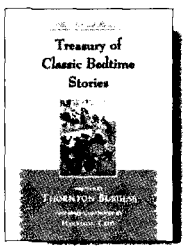
ghostly folk lived right alongside his family at his home, Piety Hill, in rural Mecosta, Mich. "Have I ever seen a ghost?" he asked. "Why I am one, and so are you—a geist, a spirit, in a mortal envelope."

The traditional religious imagery—demons, damned souls, heaven, purgatory, and hell—that animates his work is neither window dressing, nor a useful convention around which to stretch a yarn. "I venture to suggest that the more orthodox is a writer's theology," Kirk maintained, "the more convincing, as symbols and allegories, his uncanny tales will be." His stories, however, are by no means simply sermons accented with ghouls and creepy houses. Kirk combined Christian orthodoxy with first-rate storytelling. In "The Surly Sullen Bell," a traveling book salesman comes face-to-face with the reality of hell and survives only because—for once—he dares to love, dares to blow hot or cold. In "The Invasion of the Church of the Holy Ghost," an Anglo-Catholic priest maintains orthodoxy in a decaying and dangerous district of an unnamed city—and in the face of his bishop, who "spends his days comminating the president of the United States and ordaining lesbians." Maintaining the faith isn't Father Montrose's only chore: He finds himself engaged in spiritual battle with demons that desire to possess him. The demons tempt the chaste priest with a beautiful and trusting young woman. And in "Saviourgate," Mark Findlay, whose life has crumbled, contemplates suicide. He checks into a hotel where he finds a foretaste of heaven.

These stories, Kirk himself wrote, "may impart some arcane truths about good and evil; as Chesterton put it, all life is an allegory, and we can understand it only in parable." While they can be enjoyed independently, many of the stories, as well as Kirk's novel, *Lord of the Hollow Dark*, share some of the same characters. He wove plots and characters into a tapestry of redemption and damnation, and of timeless truths set in those peculiarly "thin places," as Kirk called them, where the supernatural encroaches upon the natural. **NR**

Rx for Parents





The National Review Treasury of Classic Children's Literature, Volume Two, selected by William F. Buckley Jr. (ISI, 517 pp., $29.95)

The National Review Treasury of Classic Bedtime Stories, by Thornton Burgess (ISI, 349 pp., $29.95)

MEGHAN COX GURDON

TAKE two NATIONAL REVIEW books, one whose contents are hand-picked by William F. Buckley Jr., ask a National Review Online columnist to review them, and publish the results in NATIONAL REVIEW. Surprise! The reviewer will *love* the books and urge you to buy them.

To paraphrase Mandy Rice-Davies: "Well, she would, wouldn't she?"

Sure she would. And, in this case, she's absolutely right. NATIONAL REVIEW has published two more lovely children's books and, if you have nice children anywhere in your life, you should buy them.

Designed to be read aloud, the volumes are aesthetically pleasing, with smooth stock, an eye-friendly typeface, and heft that is substantial without putting a strain on parental wrists. That is their material nature; their spirit is something more wonderful altogether. Let me start with my children's favorite of the two. In recent evenings my nine- and seven-year-olds and I have road-tested a substantial portion of *Treasury of Classic Children's Literature, Volume Two*, and I haven't heard a complaint yet. It's a shame, really, because some nights one is desperate to get the little blighters into bed. But what I invariably hear, when we've trundled to the end of a story, is, "Aw, one more, Mummy, *please!*"

Meghan Cox Gurdon is a columnist for National Review Online.

This particular *Treasury* is a WFB-selected compendium of rollicking and intelligently written stories, many of which first appeared in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in the late 19th century. In delightful pre-modern fashion, the tales abound with officious clerks, prideful kings, guilty, submissive wives, and idle poets—but also with saucy princesses, Parcheesi-playing princes, and a "poor, sensitive, lonely orphan" lion. Tom Sawyer makes an appearance, as does Mowgli, but in the main the characters will be new to young ears.

Adults have fairly strict narrative expectations—i's must be dotted and t's crossed—but children don't care if a story meanders. If an adventure is set up in great detail in one minutely observed location only to drift off and end somewhere else entirely, dropping half the characters on the way, well, they love it. This kind of storytelling conforms and appeals to the child's imagination, where weirder is better and there's no need for a tidy literary end.

More important still, for a real child-pleaser, is unswerving observance of how people actually *are*. In my experience, children intuitively share the conservative acceptance that people come in all sorts (whereas left-wingers believe we should be corrected and improved and our unpleasant attributes either ignored or blamed on someone else). The *Treasury* stories are rich in this understanding. Thus we get this, from a story called "Pigs Is Pigs": "He was a normal boy and therefore always had a guilty conscience when his father was angry. So the boy slipped quietly around the house. There is nothing so soothing to a guilty conscience as to be out of the path of the avenger." Or this, from "The Poison Bubble": "The baron was greatly surprised—as people are usually surprised when others refuse to do things that they have been in the habit of doing whether they ought to or not—and he resolved to punish the villagers."

Unfortunately children today are conditioned to expect that all deserving characters receive some sort of reward;

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there's a story in this book, "The Rhyme for Twelfth," in which a feckless poet-poseur fails to produce a birthday verse for a young princess and by an odd turn of events winds up married to a wealthy and beautiful queen in another kingdom. My children were pleased for the poet's sake, but dismayed that the royal child never got her rhyme. It is also true that not all children will be receptive to the curiosities and charm of such a book as this. If you're buying Christmas presents for gum-snapping, PG-13-watching, GameCube-playing toughies, it may be too late and you should probably buy them something with batteries.

With any luck, though, you can catch them young, and for this I must recommend the *Treasury of Classic Bedtime Stories*. The book is ever-so-slightly misnamed, for these are not the greatest hits of nursery reading, with *Goodnight Moon* and suchlike, but a collection of Thornton Burgess's folksy animal stories. There's an Uncle Remus-like cadence to his writing that I initially mistook for Southern dialect, but Burgess came from Cape Cod, lived there all his life. New England salty-talk is amazingly similar to a Mississippi drawl when it's written down.

The Burgess tales feature crafty foxes, gun-toting farm boys, world-weary buzzards, fast-talking woodchucks, and frogs with wanderlust, and they are justly loved by generations of small children. I noticed while reading aloud the adventures of Reddy Fox that my nine- and two-year-olds both drifted off to do other things, whereas the almost-four- and seven-year-olds were glued to my shoulders, leaning in to see the old-fashioned illustrations by Harrison Cady. That will give you an idea of the age range to which the book appeals.

The *Bedtime Treasury* is divided into ten sections—each dealing with the scandals and adventures of one creature, say, Jerry Muskrat—and then subdivided into digestible bits. So when your saucer-eyed children or grandchildren beg for "just one more, *please!*" you, beneficent reader, can continue the story for as long, or as briefly, as you like. Much as one loves to read aloud to children, there comes the time when they really must go to bed, and a book like this—indeed, like both of these—is ideal for settling them there happily. **NR**

If Looks Could Kill

TERRY TEACHOUT

THE critics have spoken, and ***Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*** has passed muster. According to www.rottentomatoes.com, a website that keeps track of such things, 85 percent of the film's reviews have been positive—and that's not counting the syndicated columnists and bloggers who have weighed in to like effect. And even though *Master and Commander* contains no women, no nudity, no laser beams, and (best of all) no Ben Affleck, it's a solid box-office hit to boot.

To date, the only resistance to Peter Weir's cinematic version of Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin novels about the British Navy in the days of Napoleon has come from those vexed by the fact that Weir and John Collee, who co-wrote the screenplay, have played fast and loose with the sacred texts on which the film is based. Such grousing was inevitable, for O'Brian's fans are as obsessed with the fine detail of their saga as any *Harry Potter* addict or Baker Street Irregular, and *Master and Commander* is in no way a literal adaptation. Instead, it recombines elements of several O'Brian novels into a single plot, and goes its own sweet way on countless occasions. Heresy! quoth the outraged buffs. Murder on the high seas! Clap those men in irons—or, better yet, give them a taste of the cat.

Such folk, like the poor, will always be with us, and will always be ignored. Hollywood doesn't make movies for people who read books. People who read books do go to movies, however, and one of them, Christopher Hitchens, panned *Master and Commander* in *Slate*. Now Hitchens is a contrarian who likes nothing better than to fly in the face of conventional wisdom, even when it's right and he's wrong. Yet he put his finger on an aspect of the film about which the trailer had left me extremely suspicious:

> The *summa* of O'Brian's genius was the invention of Dr. Stephen Maturin. He is the ship's gifted surgeon, but he is also a scientist, an espionage agent for the Admiralty, a man of part Irish and part Catalan birth—and a revolutionary. He joins the British side, having earlier fought against it, because of his hatred for Bonaparte's betrayal of the principles of 1789—principles that are perfectly obscure to bluff Capt. Jack Aubrey. . . . As played by the admittedly handsome and intriguing Paul Bettany, Maturin is no more than a good doctor with finer feelings and a passion for natural history. . . . A superficial buddy movie is born out of one of the subtlest and richest and most paradoxical male relationships since Holmes and Watson.

All this sounded dangerously plausible to me. I've read the Aubrey-Maturin series several times and admire it deeply (if not uncritically), but I also recognize that its virtues are of a sort not easily transferred to the screen. O'Brian's books are not traditional tales of action, even though they contain plenty of derring-do. They consist mainly of talk—in fact, they read like Trollope on a boat—and are as much about the interior drama of moral conflict as knocking Boney on the head.

For this reason, I took it for granted that *Master and Commander* would either depart drastically from O'Brian or be a long-winded bore. A faithful film adaptation of a novel of any considerable literary complexity, after all, can never be more than a species of illustration—a commentary at best, a comic book at worst. The smarter approach is for the director to subject his source material to an imaginative transformation that gives the adaptation an independent life as a free-standing art object in its own right. (It's easier to turn a great novel into a great opera than a great film.) But if you do that, you're likely to alienate the pre-sold audience of loyal fans whose existence is the reason popular books get

Mr. Teachout, the drama critic of the *Wall Street Journal* and the film critic of *Crisis*, blogs about the arts at www.terryteachout.com.

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filmed in the first place. As far as they're concerned, the more literal the adaptation, the better—and I, hardened aesthete though I am, couldn't quite keep myself from feeling the same way. This made me of two minds regarding *Master and Commander*: I knew it couldn't convey more than a fractional part of the subtleties of O'Brian's novels, but I went to see it anyway, hoping against hope that the images on the screen would at least approximate the ones in my head.

Two hours and twenty minutes later, I didn't have any images left in my head. They'd been replaced by the infinitely more vivid ones created by Weir and his resourceful collaborators. The narrow decks and low ceilings of H.M.S. *Surprise*, the Dantean clamor of a naval battle, the stomach-clutching sight of weevils crawling out of a piece of ship's biscuit—all these things look and sound so right in *Master and Commander* that it becomes impossible to envision them any other way. What's more, Russell Crowe, who plays Aubrey, is as good as he (or anyone else) could possibly be. From now on, I'll see him in my mind's eye whenever I read O'Brian.

Is that enough? Of course not, but it doesn't *need* to be enough. Yes, Peter Weir has turned a Trollopian *roman-fleuve* into an action movie, a completely exteriorized view of the Aubrey-Maturin novels—but what an exterior! Yes, you've got to go back to the novels if you want to know what Stephen Maturin is really like—but what, pray tell, is wrong with that? And as Charles Krauthammer has pointed out, *Master and Commander* may simplify O'Brian, but it hews scrupulously to his passionate belief in the military virtues: "Its depiction of the more ancient notions of duty, honor, patriotism, and devotion is reminiscent of what we glimpsed during live coverage of the dash to Baghdad back in April, but is now slipping from memory."

I rank *Master and Commander* among the best war films ever made, and I wouldn't be surprised if further viewings (for I mean to see it again as soon as I can) inspire me to put it at the very top of the list. It is stirring, enthralling, and endlessly pleasing to the eye. If you want more than that, you know what to do. **NR**

■ MUSIC ■

The Comeback Kid

JAY NORDLINGER

A MOMENTOUS event occurred at Carnegie Hall on October 31, Halloween night: Leon Fleisher played a recital with two hands. Why such a big deal? Fleisher has been one of the most celebrated pianists in the world for as long as most people can remember. But he had not played a recital in Carnegie Hall—not with ten fingers—since 1947. The evening was packed not only with musical power, but with emotional power as well.

The Fleisher story is famous, at least in music circles, but I will run through it. The pianist was born in San Francisco, to a father from Odessa and a mother from Chelm. As a boy, he came under the guidance of Pierre Monteux, the great French conductor who was resident in San Francisco. At nine, he began to study with Artur Schnabel, a historic pianist. In the summer of 1938, young Fleisher traveled to Tremezzo, Italy—on Lake Como—to take lessons from the master. Not long after, the master, of course, had to leave Europe in a hurry—and he went to New York. The Fleisher family moved from California so that Leon could study full time with him.

"Was he a good teacher?" I ask. "Could he communicate what he knew?" "He was an unbelievably good teacher," answers Fleisher. "Not only was he able to communicate what he knew, he did so at a level of inspiration that was just staggering." And, by the way, how was his English? "Oh, his English was extraordinary, for someone whose mother tongue it wasn't. He sounded like Richard Burton with a German accent. He relished each syllable."

In 1952—now age 24—Fleisher won the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium. On the jury: Artur Rubinstein, Robert Casadesus, and Rudolf Firkušný, among others. Among the other contestants: Maria Tipo, Theodore Lettvin, and Philippe Entremont (who finished *tenth*, oddly enough).

Fleisher went on to a blazing career, making soon-canonical recordings of Beethoven and Brahms with the conductor George Szell, in Cleveland. How did Szell—who could be severe—treat Fleisher? "Very well, believe it or not. He adored my teacher, and it was through him that I met Szell when I was twelve or thirteen. I think it was clear that he had some crypto-filial feelings toward me."

In 1964, Leon Fleisher was 37, and at the top of his game. But then disaster struck. He contracted what came to be known as dystonia, a neurological disorder making normal use of a hand (for example) impossible. In this case, it was the right hand. Fleisher's left hand would always remain unaffected.

"For two years," he says, "I was in a deep funk," which is to put it mildly. It was hard to do anything. He divorced. Then he slowly started coming back to life, helping to form a chamber-music group, taking up conducting (which his ailment did not prevent him from doing)—and teaching. I hazard to ask, "Did you ever resent your students, who could play, while they might have had much less to impart, musically?" "No," chuckles Fleisher, before adding, "There might have been a certain irony."

At first, Fleisher would not look at the left-hand-alone literature, which is sizable: "I denied my condition" by ignoring this music altogether. But eventually, he came to it, playing the Ravel D-major concerto, Britten's *Diversions*, and other works, many of them commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, the pianist (and brother

Leon Fleisher

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of the philosopher) who lost his right arm in World War I. Says Fleisher, "There are over 1,000 pieces for the left hand alone, and most of them are crap—forgive me. But there is one recital's worth, maybe two recitals' worth, of really good stuff." Fleisher is responsible for a lot of that stuff, as many composers of our own day came to write music especially for him.

I ask Fleisher whether, while practicing with his left hand, he would ever sneak in some right hand, just to check. "All the time, every day," he says. Was it ever any different? "It was always the same"—"petrified flesh," is one of the ways he puts it.

In 1979, another celebrated pianist, Gary Graffman, unfortunately joined him. He, too, lost the use of his right hand. Says Fleisher, with typical candor, "On one level, I was kind of grateful when it happened, because it proved that a) I wasn't crazy, and b) I wasn't a freak. And it gave me strength to cry out about this problem. A lot of people out there with dystonia don't want to talk about it, they want to hide it. You will see cancellations by pianists because they are 'indisposed.' Very often, that 'indisposition' is dystonia, to one degree or another." Needless to say, "I felt for Gary, and I knew what he was going through, but, together, we could bring attention to this problem."

Fleisher tried every kind of treatment, "from A to Z and beyond," he says. "You name it, I've done it: alternative, conventional . . . " In 1981, he attempted a comeback, having found some relief, but it proved a mirage.

Flash forward to 1995, however: The pianist found greater and more enduring relief in a process called "rolfing," and then botox. Rolfing is a kind of massage therapy that restores flexibility and softness to muscles. After two years of this therapy, Fleisher was ready for botox—the very thing that actresses (and others) now use to straighten out their wrinkles. It has a more serious function in treating dystonia, altering the neurological picture.

After 30 years of silence—two-handed silence—Leon Fleisher made a return. "Now that I look back over it, and consider the lessons I have learned, I'm not so sure that, if I could relive my life, I would have it any different. The only reason I was able to come out of that depression around '66, '67, was the knowledge, the awareness, that my relationship with music was more than just as a two-handed piano player. I became a better teacher—I couldn't push a student off the chair and say, 'This is what I need.' I had to start to use words, to convey what is essentially unconveyable in words, because of what music is. And I started to conduct, which has afforded me some of my most meaningful and satisfying moments, not only in musical life, but in life in general. The greatest joys are those that are shared."

In sum, "I have tried to put this whole experience to the best use possible."

I ask him a dumb question: "Did you ever fantasize about coming back, with both hands?" "For 30 years." I ask a less dumb question: "Did you ever doubt you would?" "No," Fleisher says. "No. I knew that there was some kind of answer, if not a total answer." People should understand that the agony did not lie in the denial of a glorious career—it lay in the inability to play, even for himself, "to realize what was in my head, to make manifest what was inside me." But Fleisher had teaching, conducting, and the left hand, and these were means of doing "what keeps me going, what keeps me alive, which is making music."

At the recital in Carnegie Hall, on Halloween night, Fleisher began with some Bach: Egon Petri's arrangement of *Sheep May Safely Graze*. He devoted the second half of the program to Schubert's Sonata in B flat, D. 960, one of the most profound works in the piano literature. Fleisher does not believe that one should play an encore after this sonata, but he had one planned: He was going to repeat *Sheep May Safely Graze*, but this time he would have the aid of some of his students, placed throughout the hall. With tape recorders in their laps, they were going to play gentle sheep bleatings—just for some levity. But Fleisher was "thwarted," as he says, because vigilant Carnegie ushers would not allow the tape recorders into the hall!

So instead, he brought out a Halloween basket—one that looked like a jack-o'-lantern—and offered candy to patrons in the first row. A light, lovely touch from a man who has been through hell, and whose greatness is far more than musical. **NR**

■ IN BRIEF ■

DANA GIOIA, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, has initiated a nationwide program, Shakespeare in American Communities, to revive teaching and appreciation of the Bard. Among the materials of this great project is a wonderful CD, *Teaching Shakespeare*, with commentary by scholars and performances of some of the great soliloquies. *Teaching Shakespeare* is designed to help high-school teachers introduce their students to the playwright; the Arts Endowment is making the CD and other materials available upon request, free of charge, to teachers, many of whom might themselves welcome a refresher course on this material. As Gioia points out in his narration, Shakespeare used to be the text, along with the King James Bible, of all Americans. In the 20th century, Shakespeare began to be perceived as the exclusive preserve of elite, "high" culture—of scholars and snobs. It is the mission of Gioia and his Endowment to remedy this misfortune.

The CD features readings by James Earl Jones, Mel Gibson, Jane Alexander, and others. Scholars Harold Bloom and George T. Wright and Folger Library director Gail Kern Paster, among others, offer commentary on meter, language, the sonnets, and "Shakespeare's psychology." The result is an engaging and instructive primer. Most delightful are the three very different renderings of the "To be or not to be" speech by Jones, Gibson, and Michael York. Gibson takes a bit of time to settle in, inserting no breath between thoughts, but delivers a most compelling and believable performance.

In his introduction, Gioia observes that "culture is not made up of institutions. . . . Culture is human energy." Nowhere is this energy more palpably present than in the work of Shakespeare. Gioia is fighting an uphill battle against general ignorance of the arts and active opposition to teaching traditional subjects. But those subjects, as illustrated by this CD, never lose their hold over our souls.

—SARAH M. BRAMWELL

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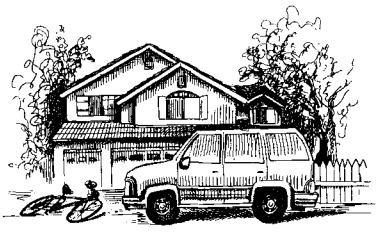
■ THE STRAGGLER ■

A Winter Idyl



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

THE first few flakes came down in mid morning. By noon it was clear the stuff was settling. Watching from the window of my study, I started mentally going through my snow checklist: Boots oiled? Wood chopped? Shovel? Salt? Gloves? By mid afternoon we had had four or five inches and I was out there shoveling. Yes, I possess a mechanical snow blower, but that is not a happy story.

There are many aspects of American life that I have never fully adjusted to. Gasoline, for example. Sure, I have stopped calling it "petrol," but I have never taken on board the American faith in the gasoline engine as the motive power of choice for any outdoor appliance. The cheerful, obliging, but severely English-challenged (and, one cannot help but suspect, documentation-challenged) workers who attend to my neighbors' lawns in spring and summer use gasoline-powered trimmers—driven by a full engine with cylinders, cam shafts, pistons, and exhausts.

This seems extravagant to me. My own trimmer, which I wield myself, is powered by electricity. You plug it in and it goes. Same job, half the trouble, a quarter the weight, a tenth the noise. When I first went shopping for lawnmowers in the U.S., in fact, I assumed I would be able to buy one of those handy "Flymo" things that people in England use. This is a light, electric-powered mower that works on the air-cushion principle, floating over the grass as it cuts, emitting a genteel hum. Once it is floating, you can maneuver it with one finger; when it is inert, you can lift it with that same finger. The Flymo, however, seems to be unknown in these United States. I ended up with a thundering 50-pound gasoline-powered behemoth for my few hundred square yards of lawn.

When, five or six years ago, I went looking for a snow blower, I was therefore delighted to find right away that an electric-powered model was on sale. I bought it at once. Snow duly arrived, and out I went to clear the driveway with my electric snow blower. At that point I discovered that America's love for the gasoline engine is not altogether irrational. Losing track of 100 feet of bright orange electric cable in a few inches of snow is much easier than you would think. It is also, one next learns, extraordinarily difficult to untangle an electric cable that has got caught up in the moving parts of a snow blower. The cable itself, when untangled, proves to have had a fair amount of its outer insulation stripped off. Worst of all, the blower is so feeble that, with a light breeze against you, most of the snow ends up just where it started from, except for what has blown down the neck of your jacket. Shoveling, in any case, provides welcome relief from my desk-bound work and leaves me with satisfying aches in shoulders and thighs.

By four o'clock I had shoveled the driveway more or less clear; and, for bonus points toward my next life, had cleared the front path of the housebound old lady opposite. Snow was still falling, though. Since I was already booted, jacketed, and outside, I volunteered to go wait at the corner for the school bus. There was just one mother there. We stood stamping our feet and discussing the storm. The bus was late. We moved on to other common interests: our kids, town affairs, a grisly crime at the college where the mother teaches. The bus was very late. I checked in at the house—no phone call from the school. I drove to the school, at eight miles per hour. The bus had left just before I arrived.

That was Friday. By midday Saturday we'd had 15 inches and I was shoveling again. The kids were thrilled. Some of the thrill was induced by the snow and its possibilities. They spent a happy couple of hours sledding in the housebound old lady's back yard, which has a long slope. Most of it, though, was just holiday feeling brought on by the cancellation of piano lesson (he) and ballet practice (she), and the thin but much-discussed possibility of school cancellations the following week. I drove to the village, eerily empty in the blowing snow. Most of the stores were shuttered, but eventually I gathered videos and snack food. Back home again, we lit a fire. There was still some trimming to be done on the Christmas tree. The kids busied themselves with that for a while, then we roasted marshmallows, watched movies, and chewed our way through packages of dates and figs.

There is no use pretending that our circumstances bore much real resemblance to the besieged intimacy of John Greenleaf Whittier's childhood memories. I once saw preserved, in a barn-museum in Vermont, one of the heavy horse-drawn rollers used to compact the snow in the days before mechanized snowplows. It did not look very efficient. Of that same state, native son John Cotton Dana remarked: "Everything in Vermont looks toward winter." Claude Fuess, in his biography of Calvin Coolidge, adds: "The houses were built close to the highway so that long walks through the snow could be avoided." I suppose Whittier's north Massachusetts boyhood was not much different. A couple of hours spent digging out one's car in order to take a drive to the video store is small hardship.

Nor are we disconnected from the larger world. The snowbound inhabitants of Whittier's poem had to wait a week before "At last the floundering carrier bore / The village paper to our door." We are better provided with news, via TV and the Internet; though it is hard not to feel that the quality of news has declined considerably since the 1820s. Instead of the Creeks rising and the liberation of Greece, we have Michael Jackson and Paris Hilton.

There is still, though, the atavistic pride in having secured for one's brood a shelter from the elements. The children's faces, laughing in the firelight at fingers stuck together with molten marshmallow, glow as those of the infant Whittier and his siblings must have glowed. Mom and Dad smile from over their books, the dog shifts on his couch (he is old and has furniture privileges). Dad sips at a glass of port—a winter drink, according to my parents, and so it will always be for me. The hardships of our ancestors are long gone, and thank goodness for it; but some of their simple pleasures are still here to be enjoyed, around the family hearth, with the snow all deep and silent outside. **NR**

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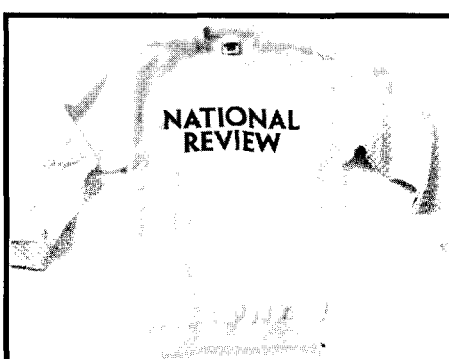

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WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.

Is Democracy Pork?

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 2

THE Democratic presidential contenders, in their most recent debate, spent much time condemning the new health bill. This was to be expected. What caught the eye was the peg every one of them used for the health measure. This, said Howard Dean—and everyone sang the same theme—was a private-interest piece of legislation. He and the others meant by this that the bill was motivated by a desire to help, or, rather, to truckle to, a single constituent entity. The candidates didn't identify older people as the extortionate entity. One does not, when running for political office, say dark things about one-third of the American voting population.

Everyone listening in on the Des Moines debate was expected to conclude that the drug companies are the profiteers from the current bill. No one seems to cavil at the assumption that new laws are exactly that, obeisances to private interests. Targeted patronage can't be disguised when we are talking about a farm bill. Farmers are intended to benefit from farm bills. Steel tariffs are intended to help steel makers. What's new and disturbing is that political figures don't seem to cavil at linking legislation to special interests. Were the 274 congressmen and senators who voted for the health bill intending to oblige a private interest? It can of course be argued that any federal disbursement is a special interest disbursement, in that money is going to the few, taken from the many.

What is missing is the invocation of the commonweal. Yes, every congressman and every senator, defending every expenditure, possibly excluding arrant pork, will defend it as being of public, not private, interest. But more and more, one gets the impression that they are winking at us when they say it. The Republican party's spokesmen don't much bother to defend their votes. We have a Republican president who pledged to reduce public spending, and we have a Republican-dominated Congress with appropriations committee heads also pledged to reduce discretionary spending. They will tell you, on the hustings, that the spending increases are owing to the defense against terrorism. And they are right in part—military spending is up 34 percent in the last two fiscal years. Yet as a share of the economy, defense spending remains well below its highs of the 1980s. Then, the military took 6 percent of the GDP; now, only 3.8 percent.

It is the other stuff that mounts and mounts, and on top of these expenditures we have now locked in an estimated $400 extra billion for the revised Medicare program. Nobody with a first-grade diploma believes the spending will stop at a mere $400 billion. The burden of the denunciations of the bill by the Democratic candidates was that it had not gone far enough in spending. Until the marginal aspirin is paid for, special interests—defined as potential voters for the Democratic presidential candidate—will not rest. The great epiphany will come only when a stray camera catches you giving an aspirin to your neighbor at the very same moment your neighbor is giving you an aspirin.

There is demoralization in the scene. Never mind that George W. promised to reduce federal spending: The fact of the matter is that he has not done so. What he has reduced is the use of the veto, reduced it to zero, the veto being the presidential instrument usable for good causes and bad, but indispensable to curb capricious exploitation of the public purse. For fiscal 2003, appropriators stuck 9,362 projects into the 13 appropriations bills, an increase of 12 percent over last year's total. In two years, these projects have increased by 48 percent. Total pork, if correctly identified by Citizens Against Government Waste, adds up to $162 billion since the inauguration of Mr. Bush.

There are of course shoals out there. They are economic realities. They drain the value of the dollar and the vat of human enterprise. But there is something else to look out for, which is the credibility of democratic practice. If everybody preaches A while condoning B, you get not only inflated costs, but deflated confidence in democratic government.

WTO at Bat

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 5

WHEN you think to get mad at the World Trade Organization, bear in mind that the good old U.S.A. was foremost in recommending its creation in 1995. If the idea is free trade, then somebody has to have the authority to rule that you're cheating. There are many ways to cheat. You manufacture a mousetrap and persuade your congressman to introduce a bill that gives to mousetrap manufacturers tax endearments that result in making the mousetraps very cheap to manufacture. Or you can get your compliant bank to extend credits to the company which it could not have got from any bank at arm's length; and lo, USTRAP Inc. continues life and appeals to foreign buyers with its very low price. When President Bush decided to protect steel a year and a half ago, he did it very directly; he simply decreed tariffs on foreign steel.

The thunder we heard last week was the WTO court. It inspected the presidential move on steel and tested the exclusions that provided for protection. If there was an acute national shortage or if a nation's defenses were imperiled—you name it. But it was very clear that we were moved to protect steel only for political purposes. Take just the steel that's manufactured in West Virginia. If West Virginia had voted Democratic in 2000 instead of GOP, Al Gore would have been president, not George Bush.

But the WTO's court can rise from judicial alabaster and spring to life like Machiavelli on a mission. The steel people in the countries afflicted by the U.S. tariff did a little economic/-political sleuthing and came up with initiatives by which the WTO could

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talk back to the U.S.A. How about imposing tariffs on oranges from Florida? And maybe on cheese from Wisconsin. And maybe on computers from Texas. TEXAS!!! STOP!!!!

The WTO emerges as an outfit that can make shrewd decisions and ask pretty direct political questions. The motive to protect steel was exactly that, political. And a worldly institution like the WTO isn't going to use up its retaliatory resources by imposing countertariffs on, say, American petroleum products, all of which we hungrily use here at home. The idea was to use the same reasoning used by Mr. Bush when he extended a hand to U.S. steel: What states does the Republican party particularly wish not to offend? These would be targeted by the WTO salient. Mr. Bush capitulated.

It is a welcome byproduct of this most recent venture in protectionism that the steel industry has substantially benefited from it. In pleading to extend the tariff, a spokesman for the industry pointed out that there had already been a consolidation; that the steel being produced was better and cheaper than it had been; that the labor unions were cooperating in lowering costs. The steel companies just wanted more time. But the WTO was not chartered to weigh such matters.

Unquestionably, the Democrats will do what they can to arouse fear & loathing against Mr. Bush. But they will need to train their megaphones carefully. Okay to blast that message in Virginia and Pennsylvania. Not okay to sound off in Florida and Wisconsin and Texas, where the counter-protectionist guns were trained. And the message would have to be spoken out delicately in Detroit, which has been paying more for steel, making the U.S. car more expensive because of protectionist steel prices.

In the long run the case against protectionism speaks for itself. The U.S. is hardly blameless in the matter of free trade. Perhaps one day the WTO will take a look at sugar. We pay for it as much as five times more per pound than we would if we let it in from the Dominican Republic and elsewhere at a market price. These things take time, but WTO vs. U.S. steel gives heart to the free-trade community.

Punishing the Dissenters

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 12

UNNAMED administration spokesman: You agree, what I tell you will be completely off the record?

Questioner: Yes, sir. But let's get right to the point: The exclusion of Germany, France, and Russia from bidding was—

A: Just plain dumb.

Q: Why does the administration do things that are just plain dumb?

A: The way life works in high-circle administrative life, Joe—

Q: You don't need to be condescending. I've been around a long long time, looking in on White House cultures.

A: I didn't mean that. I mean, what experienced people know about that culture isn't being very widely applied in this situation. The objective was to pass the word to Germany, France, and Russia—we'll call them the Dissenters—that there are unpleasant consequences to failing to side with the U.S. on major policy issues that have to do with national security.

Q: Is that why the Pentagon used the phrase, "for the protection of the essential security interests" of the U.S.? Which by the way, what does *that* mean? That we can't let the Dissenters bid for $18 billion in prime contracts in Iraq because to do so would fail to protect essential security interests?

A: You're right. That formulation was gobbledygook. The objective was to register U.S. displeasure with muscle behind that displeasure. There are commercial interests in the Dissenter nations that will be sore to have been excluded from the bidding.

Q: But the order didn't rule out subcontractors from the Dissenter nations getting into rebuilding Iraq.

A: Right. The ban is only at the first level. Germany's BDI group blurted it out, admitting that the only firms affected are those that don't have subsidiaries in any of the 63 countries allowed to take part in the tenders, which means, roughly speaking, nobody.

Q: Well, if it's not going to have a practical economic effect, why do it?

A: Satisfaction. The White House people liked the feel of a reproach. Recall JFK's dictum: Don't get mad, get even.

Q: But we aren't getting even, if you're telling it right. And we've handed the Dissenters an excuse to get out of the pool of countries that could help Iraq by giving up debts. Russia especially, with $8 billion owed. They've already said maybe they won't move on that, and Canada is spitting mad—

A: Yes, they're angry. But they'll cool off. We'll just have to leave it that a point has been registered. Are you asking me to defend what was done, step by step? I can't do that. In situations like this, there isn't clear cockpit control. The White House is sore at the Pentagon guy who let it out, but what's to be done about that, fire Rumsfeld? The U.S. can sort of back away. A series of equivocations. Like, Who is a prime bidder? Who is a subcontractor? Is there a WTO problem here? It'll blow away.

Q: It's not going to blow away for Bush at the next Democratic debate. They'll team up on the theme of the administration's incompetence. And they'll go on about economic opportunism, commercialism, favoritism. Is it true Halliburton is getting an extra buck for every gallon of gas it ships over?

A: Halliburton is, for the Democrats, the gorilla, the monster, the archetype of GOP favoritism/greed/exploitation.

Q: What's to be done about that?

A: If this gets out, I'll know you've betrayed me.

Q: If what gets out?

A: My secret remedy for the Democrats . . . They should *buy* Halliburton. Why not? Ask Soros to buy it. Figure $10 billion, in round numbers.

Q: You must be kidding.

A: Pretend you never thought of it.

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MARK STEYN

Democrats Down a Hole

I'd barely heard of Noam Chomsky before 9/11. I'd dipped into *Manufacturing Consent*, but I kept dozing off, usually in the middle of phrases like "premises of discourse." But, insofar as I understand it, the premise of its discourse is this—everything you read, hear, or see in a newspaper, magazine, radio, or TV show is part of one almighty shell trick designed to serve "the elite domination of media and marginalization of dissidents." Reality is a mere Matrix, to use a now-discredited pop-culture allusion. The media are the blue pill: You take them and the façade of normality persists. Noam is the red pill: Read him and you'll understand how deep the rabbit hole really goes.

The great advantage of declaring that reality is a racket is that you can never be proved wrong. For two years, the Left has been chugging down red pills way beyond the recommended dosage, and they're now so deep down the rabbit hole they'll never get back. None of this seems to trouble the Left's icons: Nothing they predict ever happens—millions dead in Afghanistan, millions dead in Iraq, humanitarian disaster, etc. Nonetheless, it's Bush and Blair who are the "liars," even though most of the alleged "lies" fall into the category of not-yet-fully-verifiable circumstantial inferences, and most of them get a little more firmed up with each month—Mohamed Atta's ties to Baghdad, Saddam's nuclear shopping in Africa, etc.

Meanwhile, the lefty superstars simply move on to a new fantasy. In Noam's rabbit hole, the buck never stops with him. Ask about the "silent genocide" he said was going on in Afghanistan in October 2001 and Noam replies, "That is an interesting fabrication." He doesn't deny that he used the words "Looks like what's happening is some sort of silent genocide"; he simply denies that the words mean what they appear to mean to anyone whose first language is non-university English.

What a great country! Where else can you get rich by convincing people that your getting everything wrong is merely conclusive proof of the pervasive distortions of "the prevailing moral and intellectual culture"? I can see why an ambitious college kid might want to *be* Noam Chomsky, but I can't see why he'd want to read Noam Chomsky. Likewise Michael Moore, the carny-freak-show version of the Chomsky act. Moore has got rich by peddling cynicism to the naïve. Moore is so cynical he's cynical about cynicism: He has figured out that,

MICHAEL SPRINGER/GETTY

in a postmodern culture, a large segment of the population so yearns for the pose of cynicism that it'll fall for any old hooey. There's no one so naïve as a wannabe cynic who longs to fall in line with the herd of iconoclasts parroting the Moore/Chomsky slogans—the intellectual equivalent of those teenagers who express their individuality by wearing exactly the same clothes as everyone else.

Which brings us to the Democratic party. With one or two slightly surprising exceptions (Hillary, Joe Biden), sometime in late 2001 they overdosed on the Chomsky-Moore red pills, and, unlike the insulated poppers of academe and showbiz, they've set themselves up for a series of bumpy falls down to reality. Not long before Saddam's capture, I caught John Kerry on the stump in New Hampshire: "This president can't find Saddam Hussein, he can't find Osama bin Laden, he can't even find the leaker in the White House."

It's true that the Coalition was having a difficult time hunting down the Baathist butcher. It's a big country. It's as hard to find one man in Iraq as it is to find a single John Kerry sign in the northern half of New Hampshire. I tried the other week and eventually I found one halfway up Route 10, but I had to devote enormous resources and manpower to it and I wasted a lot of time relying on leads from flawed intelligence. But Kerry & Co. ought to have got the message by now: The balance of probability suggests that things will go the administration's way.

Of Senator Kerry's three presidential failures, one's been found, another no one cares about—remember the name Valerie Plame?—and, as for the third, if whatever's left of Osama has enough granules to be scraped out of the rubble and identified in an FBI lab, isn't the balance of probability that in the fullness of time this will be an all-too-predictable third strike for the Dems? Even bin Laden's silence looks, with each passing week, less like lying low and more like an inability to get up again: Already, the period since 9/11 is the longest interval between al-Qaeda strikes on U.S.-government targets in a decade.

In the right circumstances, the Hillary tack might conceivably work for the party. The Chomsky-Moore-BBC-French approach never will. A real cynic, as opposed to a Chomskyite dupe, in the British government told me a year ago: "Tony's got that Messianic gleam again, which is terribly tedious. I can't see why we need to depose Saddam, but the point is that Bush is going to do it, he's bound to win, and we'll look silly if we're on the wrong side of that. So we might as well go along."

There's more wisdom in that decayed Labour party cynicism than in the entire Kerry, Edwards, Clark, and Dean campaigns. On the day of Saddam's capture, I heard Howard Dean's attempt at a gracious statement described on the radio as "damage control." When good news for the Iraqi people, the American people, and the civilized world is something you have to do "damage control" on, you know you're way too far down the rabbit hole. **NR**

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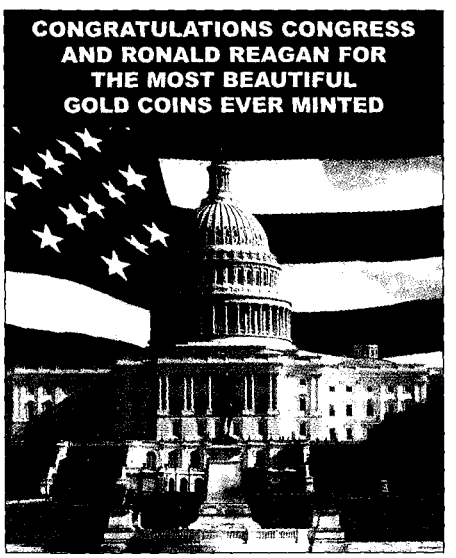

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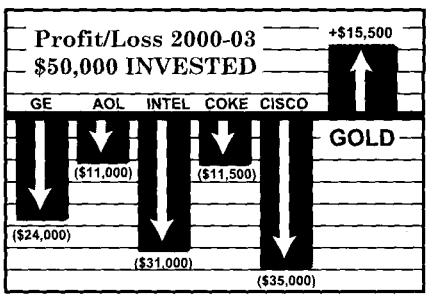

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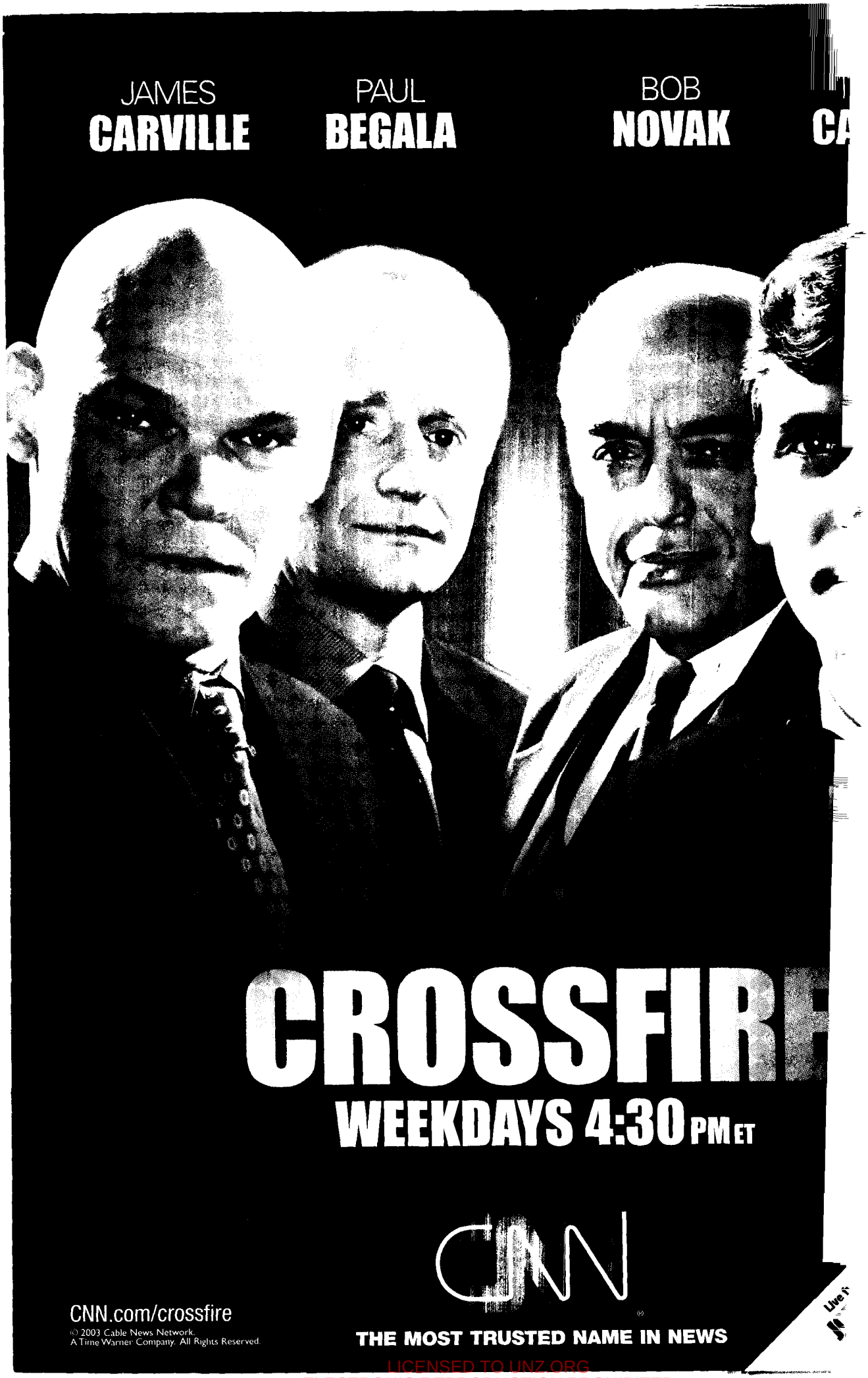

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